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CHITA:

A MEMORY OF LAST ISLAND

BY

LAFCADIO HEARN

"But Nature whistled with all her winds,
Did as she pleased, and went her way."
—EMERSON

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Je suis la vaste mêlée,—
Reptile, étant l'onde; ailée,
Étant le vent,—
Force et fuite, haine et vie,
Houle immense, poursuivie
Et poursuivant.

—Victor Hugo.

PART I.

The Legend of L'Île Dernière.

THE LEGEND OF L'ÎLE DERNIÈRE.

I.

TRAVELLING south from New Orleans to the Islands, you pass through a strange land into a strange sea, by various winding waterways. You can journey to the Gulf by lugger if you please; but the trip may be made much more rapidly and agreeably on some one of those light, narrow steamers, built especially for bayou-travel, which usually receive passengers at a point not far from the foot of old Saint-Louis Street, hard by the sugar-landing, where there is ever a pushing and flocking of steam-craft—all striving for place to rest their white breasts against the levée, side by side,—like great weary

swans. But the miniature steamboat on which you engage passage to the Gulf never lingers long in the Mississippi: she crosses the river, slips into some canal-mouth, labors along the artificial channel awhile, and then leaves it with a scream of joy, to puff her free way down many a league of heavily shadowed bayou. Perhaps thereafter she may bear you through the immense silence of drenched rice-fields, where the yellow-green level is broken at long intervals by the black silhouette of some irrigating machine;—but, whichever of the five different routes be pursued, you will find yourself more than once floating through sombre mazes of swamp-forest,—past assemblages of cypresses all hoary with the parasitic tillandsia, and grotesque as gatherings of fetich-gods. Ever from river or from lakelet the steamer glides again into canal

or bayou,—from bayou or canal once more into lake or bay; and sometimes the swamp-forest visibly thins away from these shores into wastes of reedy morass where, even of breathless nights, the quaggy soil trembles to a sound like thunder of breakers on a coast: the storm-roar of billions of reptile voices chanting in cadence,—rhythmically surging in stupendous *crescendo* and *diminuendo*,—a monstrous and appalling chorus of frogs! . . . .

Panting, screaming, scraping her bottom over the sand-bars,—all day the little steamer strives to reach the grand blaze of blue open water below the marsh-lands; and perhaps she may be fortunate enough to enter the Gulf about the time of sunset. For the sake of passengers, she travels by day only; but there are other vessels which make the journey also by night —threading the bayou-labyrinths winter

and summer: sometimes steering by the North Star,—sometimes feeling the way with poles in the white season of fogs,—sometimes, again, steering by that Star of Evening which in our sky glows like another moon, and drops over the silent lakes as she passes a quivering trail of silver fire.

Shadows lengthen; and at last the woods dwindle away behind you into thin bluish lines;—land and water alike take more luminous color;—bayous open into broad passes;—lakes link themselves with sea-bays;—and the ocean-wind bursts upon you,—keen, cool, and full of light. For the first time the vessel begins to swing,—rocking to the great living pulse of the tides. And gazing from the deck around you, with no forest walls to break the view, it will seem to you that the low land must have once been rent asunder

by the sea, and strewn about the Gulf in fantastic tatters. . . .

Sometimes above a waste of wind-blown prairie-cane you see an oasis emerging,—a ridge or hillock heavily umbraged with the rounded foliage of evergreen oaks:—a *chénière.* And from the shining flood also kindred green knolls arise,—pretty islets, each with its beach-girdle of dazzling sand and shells, yellow-white,—and all radiant with semi-tropical foliage, myrtle and palmetto, orange and magnolia. Under their emerald shadows curious little villages of palmetto huts are drowsing, where dwell a swarthy population of Orientals,—Malay fishermen, who speak the Spanish-Creole of the Philippines as well as their own Tagal, and perpetuate in Louisiana the Catholic traditions of the Indies. There are girls in those unfamiliar villages worthy to inspire any stat-

uary,—beautiful with the beauty of ruddy bronze,—gracile as the palmettoes that sway above them.... Further seaward you may also pass a Chinese settlement: some queer camp of wooden dwellings clustering around a vast platform that stands above the water upon a thousand piles;—over the miniature wharf you can scarcely fail to observe a white sign-board painted with crimson ideographs. The great platform is used for drying fish in the sun; and the fantastic characters of the sign, literally translated, mean: "*Heap—Shrimp—Plenty.*"... And finally all the land melts down into desolations of sea-marsh, whose stillness is seldom broken, except by the melancholy cry of long-legged birds, and in wild seasons by that sound which shakes all shores when the weird Musician of the Sea touches the bass keys of his mighty organ....

II.

Beyond the sea-marshes a curious archipelago lies. If you travel by steamer to the sea-islands to-day, you are tolerably certain to enter the Gulf by Grande Pass —skirting Grande Terre, the most familiar island of all, not so much because of its proximity as because of its great crumbling fort and its graceful pharos: the stationary White-Light of Barataria. Otherwise the place is bleakly uninteresting: a wilderness of wind-swept grasses and sinewy weeds waving away from a thin beach ever speckled with drift and decaying things,—worm-riddled timbers, dead porpoises. Eastward the russet level is broken by the columnar silhouette of the light-house, and again, beyond it, by some puny scrub timber, above which rises the angular ruddy mass of the old brick fort,

whose ditches swarm with crabs, and whose sluiceways are half choked by obsolete cannon-shot, now thickly covered with incrustation of oyster shells. . . . Around all the gray circling of a shark-haunted sea. . . .

Sometimes of autumn evenings there, when the hollow of heaven flames like the interior of a chalice, and waves and clouds are flying in one wild rout of broken gold,—you may see the tawny grasses all covered with something like husks,—wheat-colored husks,—large, flat, and disposed evenly along the lee-side of each swaying stalk, so as to present only their edges to the wind. But, if you approach, those pale husks all break open to display strange splendors of scarlet and seal-brown, with arabesque mottlings in white and black: they change into wondrous living blossoms, which detach

themselves before your eyes and rise in air, and flutter away by thousands to settle down farther off, and turn into wheat-colored husks once more . . . a whirling flower-drift of sleepy butterflies!

Southwest, across the pass, gleams beautiful Grande Isle: primitively a wilderness of palmetto (*latanier*);—then drained, diked, and cultivated by Spanish sugar-planters; and now familiar chiefly as a bathing-resort. Since the war the ocean reclaimed its own;—the cane-fields have degenerated into sandy plains, over which tramways wind to the smooth beach;—the plantation-residences have been converted into rustic hotels, and the negro-quarters remodelled into villages of cozy cottages for the reception of guests. But with its imposing groves of oak, its golden wealth of orange-trees, its odorous lanes of ole-

ander, its broad grazing-meadows yellow-starred with wild camomile, Grande Isle remains the prettiest island of the Gulf; and its loveliness is exceptional. For the bleakness of Grand Terre is reiterated by most of the other islands,—Caillou, Cassetête, Calumet, Wine Island, the twin Timbaliers, Gull Island, and the many islets haunted by the gray pelican,—all of which are little more than sand-bars covered with wiry grasses, prairie-cane, and scrub-timber. Last Island (*L'Île Dernière*),—well worthy a long visit in other years, in spite of its remoteness, is now a ghastly desolation twenty-five miles long. Lying nearly forty miles west of Grande Isle, it was nevertheless far more populated a generation ago: it was not only the most celebrated island of the group, but also the most fashionable watering-place of the aristocratic

South;—to-day it is visited by fishermen only, at long intervals. Its admirable beach in many respects resembled that of Grande Isle to-day; the accommodations also were much similar, although finer: a charming village of cottages facing the Gulf near the western end. The hotel itself was a massive two-story construction of timber, containing many apartments, together with a large dining-room and dancing-hall. In rear of the hotel was a bayou, where passengers landed—"Village Bayou" it is still called by seamen;—but the deep channel which now cuts the island in two a little eastwardly did not exist while the village remained. The sea tore it out in one night—the same night when trees, fields, dwellings, all vanished into the Gulf, leaving no vestige of former human habitation except a few of those strong brick props and foundations upon

which the frame houses and cisterns had been raised. One living creature was found there after the cataclysm—a cow! But how that solitary cow survived the fury of a storm-flood that actually rent the island in twain has ever remained a mystery. . . .

III.

On the Gulf side of these islands you may observe that the trees—when there are any trees—all bend away from the sea; and, even of bright, hot days when the wind sleeps, there is something grotesquely pathetic in their look of agonized terror. A group of oaks at Grande Isle I remember as especially suggestive: five stooping silhouettes in line against the horizon, like fleeing women with streaming garments and wind-blown hair, —bowing grievously and thrusting out arms desperately northward as to save

themselves from falling. And they are being pursued indeed;—for the sea is devouring the land. Many and many a mile of ground has yielded to the tireless charging of Ocean's cavalry: far out you can see, through a good glass, the porpoises at play where of old the sugar-cane shook out its million bannerets; and shark-fins now seam deep water above a site where pigeons used to coo. Men build dikes; but the besieging tides bring up their battering-rams—whole forests of drift—huge trunks of water-oak and weighty cypress. Forever the yellow Mississippi strives to build; forever the sea struggles to destroy;—and amid their eternal strife the islands and the promontories change shape, more slowly, but not less fantastically, than the clouds of heaven.

And worthy of study are those wan

battle-grounds where the woods made their last brave stand against the irresistible invasion,—usually at some long point of sea-marsh, widely fringed with billowing sand. Just where the waves curl beyond such a point you may discern a multitude of blackened, snaggy shapes protruding above the water,—some high enough to resemble ruined chimneys, others bearing a startling likeness to enormous skeleton-feet and skeleton-hands,—with crustaceous white growths clinging to them here and there like remnants of integument. These are bodies and limbs of drowned oaks,—so long drowned that the shell-scurf is inch-thick upon parts of them. Farther in upon the beach immense trunks lie overthrown. Some look like vast broken columns; some suggest colossal torsos imbedded, and seem to reach out mutilated stumps in despair

from their deepening graves;—and beside these are others which have kept their feet with astounding obstinacy, although the barbarian tides have been charging them for twenty years, and gradually torn away the soil above and beneath their roots. The sand around,—soft beneath and thinly crusted upon the surface,—is everywhere pierced with holes made by a beautifully mottled and semi-diaphanous crab, with hairy legs, big staring eyes, and milk-white claws;—while in the green sedges beyond there is a perpetual rustling, as of some strong wind beating among reeds: a marvellous creeping of "fiddlers," which the inexperienced visitor might at first mistake for so many peculiar beetles, as they run about sideways, each with his huge single claw folded upon his body like a wing-case. Year by year that rustling strip of green

land grows narrower; the sand spreads and sinks, shuddering and wrinkling like a living brown skin; and the last standing corpses of the oaks, ever clinging with naked, dead feet to the sliding beach, lean more and more out of the perpendicular. As the sands subside, the stumps appear to creep; their intertwisted masses of snakish roots seem to crawl, to writhe,—like the reaching arms of cephalopods. . . .

. . . Grande Terre is going: the sea mines her fort, and will before many years carry the ramparts by storm. Grande Isle is going,—slowly but surely: the Gulf has eaten three miles into her meadowed land. Last Island has gone! How it went I first heard from the lips of a veteran pilot, while we sat one evening together on the trunk of a drifted cypress which some high tide had pressed deeply into the Grande Isle beach. The day had

been tropically warm; we had sought the shore for a breath of living air. Sunset came, and with it the ponderous heat lifted,—a sudden breeze blew,—lightnings flickered in the darkening horizon,—wind and water began to strive together,—and soon all the low coast boomed. Then my companion began his story; perhaps the coming of the storm inspired him to speak! And as I listened to him, listening also to the clamoring of the coast, there flashed back to me recollection of a singular Breton fancy: that the Voice of the Sea is never one voice, but a tumult of many voices—voices of drowned men, —the muttering of multitudinous dead,— the moaning of innumerable ghosts, all rising, to rage against the living, at the great Witch-call of storms. . . .

IV.

The charm of a single summer day on these island shores is something impossible to express, never to be forgotten. Rarely, in the paler zones, do earth and heaven take such luminosity: those will best understand me who have seen the splendor of a West Indian sky. And yet there is a tenderness of tint, a caress of color, in these Gulf-days which is not of the Antilles,—a spirituality, as of eternal tropical spring. It must have been to even such a sky that Xenophanes lifted up his eyes of old when he vowed the Infinite Blue was God;—it was indeed under such a sky that De Soto named the vastest and grandest of Southern havens Espiritu Santo,—the Bay of the Holy Ghost. There is a something unutterable in this bright Gulf-air that compels awe,—some-

thing vital, something holy, something pantheistic: and reverentially the mind asks itself if what the eye beholds is not the Πνεύμα indeed, the Infinite Breath, the Divine Ghost, the great Blue Soul of the Unknown. All, all is blue in the calm,—save the low land under your feet, which you almost forget, since it seems only as a tiny green flake afloat in the liquid eternity of day. Then slowly, caressingly, irresistibly, the witchery of the Infinite grows upon you: out of Time and Space you begin to dream with open eyes,—to drift into delicious oblivion of facts,—to forget the past, the present, the substantial,—to comprehend nothing but the existence of that infinite Blue Ghost as something into which you would wish to melt utterly away forever. . . .

And this day-magic of azure endures sometimes for months together. Cloud-

lessly the dawn reddens up through a violet east: there is no speck upon the blossoming of its Mystical Rose,—unless it be the silhouette of some passing gull, whirling his sickle-wings against the crimsoning. Ever, as the sun floats higher, the flood shifts its color. Sometimes smooth and gray, yet flickering with the morning gold, it is the vision of John,—the apocalyptic Sea of Glass mixed with fire;—again, with the growing breeze, it takes that incredible purple tint familiar mostly to painters of West Indian scenery;—once more, under the blaze of noon, it changes to a waste of broken emerald. With evening, the horizon assumes tints of inexpressible sweetness,—pearl-lights, opaline colors of milk and fire; and in the west are topaz-glowings and wondrous flushings as of nacre. Then, if the sea sleeps, it dreams of all these,—faintly,

weirdly,—shadowing them even to the verge of heaven.

Beautiful, too, are those white phantasmagoria which, at the approach of equinoctial days, mark the coming of the winds. Over the rim of the sea a bright cloud gently pushes up its head. It rises; and others rise with it, to right and left—slowly at first; then more swiftly. All are brilliantly white and flocculent, like loose new cotton. Gradually they mount in enormous line high above the Gulf, rolling and wreathing into an arch that expands and advances,—bending from horizon to horizon. A clear, cold breath accompanies its coming. Reaching the zenith, it seems there to hang poised awhile,—a ghostly bridge arching the empyrean,—upreaching its measureless span from either underside of the world. Then the colossal phantom begins to turn, as

on a pivot of air,—always preserving its curvilinear symmetry, but moving its unseen ends beyond and below the sky-circle. And at last it floats away unbroken beyond the blue sweep of the world, with a wind following after. Day after day, almost at the same hour, the white arc rises, wheels, and passes. . . .

. . . Never a glimpse of rock on these low shores;—only long sloping beaches and bars of smooth tawny sand. Sand and sea teem with vitality;—over all the dunes there is a constant susurration, a blattering and swarming of crustacea;—through all the sea there is a ceaseless play of silver lightning,—flashing of myriad fish. Sometimes the shallows are thickened with minute, transparent, crab-like organisms,—all colorless as gelatine. There are days also when countless medusæ drift in—beautiful veined creatures

that throb like hearts, with perpetual systole and diastole of their diaphanous envelops: some, of translucent azure or rose, seem in the flood the shadows or ghosts of huge campanulate flowers;—others have the semblance of strange living vegetables,—great milky tubers, just beginning to sprout. But woe to the human skin grazed by those shadowy sproutings and spectral stamens!—the touch of glowing iron is not more painful. . . . Within an hour or two after their appearance all these tremulous jellies vanish mysteriously as they came.

Perhaps, if a bold swimmer, you may venture out alone a long way—once! Not twice!—even in company. As the water deepens beneath you, and you feel those ascending wave-currents of coldness arising which bespeak profundity, you will also begin to feel innumerable touches, as

of groping fingers—touches of the bodies of fish, innumerable fish, fleeing towards shore. The farther you advance, the more thickly you will feel them come; and above you and around you, to right and left, others will leap and fall so swiftly as to daze the sight, like intercrossing fountain-jets of fluid silver. The gulls fly lower about you, circling with sinister squeaking cries;—perhaps for an instant your feet touch in the deep something heavy, swift, lithe, that rushes past with a swirling shock. Then the fear of the Abyss, the vast and voiceless Nightmare of the Sea, will come upon you; the silent panic of all those opaline millions that flee glimmering by will enter into you also. . . .

From what do they flee thus perpetually? Is it from the giant sawfish or the ravening shark?—from the herds of the

porpoises, or from the *grande-écaille*,—that splendid monster whom no net may hold,—all helmed and armored in argent plate-mail?—or from the hideous devil-fish of the Gulf,—gigantic, flat-bodied, black, with immense side-fins ever outspread like the pinions of a bat,—the terror of luggermen, the uprooter of anchors? From all these, perhaps, and from other monsters likewise—goblin shapes evolved by Nature as destroyers, as equilibrists, as counterchecks to that prodigious fecundity, which, unhindered, would thicken the deep into one measureless and waveless ferment of being. . . . But when there are many bathers these perils are forgotten,—numbers give courage,—one can abandon one's self, without fear of the invisible, to the long, quivering, electrical caresses of the sea. . . .

V.

Thirty years ago, Last Island lay steeped in the enormous light of even such magical days. July was dying;—for weeks no fleck of cloud had broken the heaven's blue dream of eternity; winds held their breath; slow wavelets caressed the bland brown beach with a sound as of kisses and whispers. To one who found himself alone, beyond the limits of the village and beyond the hearing of its voices,—the vast silence, the vast light, seemed full of weirdness. And these hushes, these transparencies, do not always inspire a causeless apprehension: they are omens sometimes—omens of coming tempest. Nature,—incomprehensible Sphinx!—before her mightiest bursts of rage, ever puts forth her divinest witchery, makes more manifest her awful beauty....

But in that forgotten summer the witchery lasted many long days,—days born in rose-light, buried in gold. It was the height of the season. The long myrtle-shadowed village was thronged with its summer population;—the big hotel could hardly accommodate all its guests;—the bathing-houses were too few for the crowds who flocked to the water morning and evening. There were diversions for all,—hunting and fishing parties, yachting excursions, rides, music, games, promenades. Carriage wheels whirled flickering along the beach, seaming its smoothness noiselessly, as if muffled. Love wrote its dreams upon the sand....

...Then one great noon, when the blue abyss of day seemed to yawn over the world more deeply than ever before, a sudden change touched the quicksilver smoothness of the waters—the swaying

shadow of a vast motion. First the whole sea-circle appeared to rise up bodily at the sky; the horizon-curve lifted to a straight line; the line darkened and approached, —a monstrous wrinkle, an immeasurable fold of green water, moving swift as a cloud-shadow pursued by sunlight. But it had looked formidable only by startling contrast with the previous placidity of the open: it was scarcely two feet high;—it curled slowly as it neared the beach, and combed itself out in sheets of woolly foam with a low, rich roll of whispered thunder. Swift in pursuit another followed—a third —a feebler fourth; then the sea only swayed a little, and stilled again. Minutes passed, and the immeasurable heaving recommenced—one, two, three, four . . . seven long swells this time;—and the Gulf smoothed itself once more. Irregularly the phenomenon continued to

repeat itself, each time with heavier billowing and briefer intervals of quiet—until at last the whole sea grew restless and shifted color and flickered green;—the swells became shorter and changed form. Then from horizon to shore ran one uninterrupted heaving—one vast green swarming of snaky shapes, rolling in to hiss and flatten upon the sand. Yet no single cirrus-speck revealed itself through all the violet heights: there was no wind! —you might have fancied the sea had been upheaved from beneath. . . .

And indeed the fancy of a seismic origin for a windless surge would not appear in these latitudes to be utterly without foundation. On the fairest days a southeast breeze may bear you an odor singular enough to startle you from sleep,—a strong, sharp smell as of fish-oil; and gazing at the sea you might be still more

startled at the sudden apparition of great oleaginous patches spreading over the water, sheeting over the swells. That is, if you had never heard of the mysterious submarine oil-wells, the volcanic fountains, unexplored, that well up with the eternal pulsing of the Gulf-Stream. . . .

But the pleasure-seekers of Last Island knew there must have been a "great blow" somewhere that day. Still the sea swelled; and a splendid surf made the evening bath delightful. Then, just at sundown, a beautiful cloud-bridge grew up and arched the sky with a single span of cottony pink vapor, that changed and deepened color with the dying of the iridescent day. And the cloud-bridge approached, stretched, strained, and swung round at last to make way for the coming of the gale,—even as the light bridges that traverse the dreamy Têche swing open

when luggermen sound through their conch-shells the long, bellowing signal of approach.

Then the wind began to blow, with the passing of July. It blew from the northeast, clear, cool. It blew in enormous sighs, dying away at regular intervals, as if pausing to draw breath. All night it blew; and in each pause could be heard the answering moan of the rising surf,—as if the rhythm of the sea moulded itself after the rhythm of the air,—as if the waving of the water responded precisely to the waving of the wind,—a billow for every puff, a surge for every sigh.

The August morning broke in a bright sky;—the breeze still came cool and clear from the northeast. The waves were running now at a sharp angle to the shore: they began to carry fleeces, an innumerable flock of vague green shapes, wind-

driven to be despoiled of their ghostly wool. Far as the eye could follow the line of the beach, all the slope was white with the great shearing of them. Clouds came, flew as in a panic against the face of the sun, and passed. All that day and through the night and into the morning again the breeze continued from the north-east, blowing like an equinoctial gale. . . .

Then day by day the vast breath freshened steadily, and the waters heightened. A week later sea-bathing had become perilous: colossal breakers were herding in, like moving leviathan-backs, twice the height of a man. Still the gale grew, and the billowing waxed mightier, and faster and faster overhead flew the tatters of torn cloud. The gray morning of the 9th wanly lighted a surf that appalled the best swimmers: the sea was one wild agony of foam, the gale was rending off the heads

of the waves and veiling the horizon with a fog of salt spray. Shadowless and gray the day remained; there were mad bursts of lashing rain. Evening brought with it a sinister apparition, looming through a cloud-rent in the west—a scarlet sun in a green sky. His sanguine disk, enormously magnified, seemed barred like the body of a belted planet. A moment, and the crimson spectre vanished; and the moonless night came.

Then the Wind grew weird. It ceased being a breath; it became a Voice moaning across the world,—hooting,—uttering nightmare sounds,—*Whoo!—whoo!—whoo!*—and with each stupendous owl-cry the mooing of the waters seemed to deepen, more and more abysmally, through all the hours of darkness. From the northwest the breakers of the bay began to roll high over the sandy

slope, into the salines;—the village bayou broadened to a bellowing flood.... So the tumult swelled and the turmoil heightened until morning,—a morning of gray gloom and whistling rain. Rain of bursting clouds and rain of wind-blown brine from the great spuming agony of the sea.

The steamer *Star* was due from St. Mary's that fearful morning. Could she come? No one really believed it,—no one. And nevertheless men struggled to the roaring beach to look for her, because hope is stronger than reason....

Even to-day, in these Creole islands, the advent of the steamer is the great event of the week. There are no telegraph lines, no telephones: the mail-packet is the only trustworthy medium of communication with the outer world, bringing friends, news, letters. The

magic of steam has placed New Orleans nearer to New York than to the Timbaliers, nearer to Washington than to Wine Island, nearer to Chicago than to Barataria Bay. And even during the deepest sleep of waves and winds there will come betimes to sojourners in this unfamiliar archipelago a feeling of lonesomeness that is a fear, a feeling of isolation from the world of men,—totally unlike that sense of solitude which haunts one in the silence of mountain-heights, or amid the eternal tumult of lofty granitic coasts: a sense of helpless insecurity. The land seems but an undulation of the sea-bed: its highest ridges do not rise more than the height of a man above the salines on either side;—the salines themselves lie almost level with the level of the flood-tides;—the tides are variable, treacherous, mysterious. But when all around

and above these ever-changing shores the twin vastnesses of heaven and sea begin to utter the tremendous revelation of themselves as infinite forces in contention, then indeed this sense of separation from humanity appals. . . . Perhaps it was such a feeling which forced men, on the tenth day of August, eighteen hundred and fifty-six, to hope against hope for the coming of the *Star*, and to strain their eyes towards far-off Terrebonne. "It was a wind you could lie down on," said my friend the pilot.

. . . "Great God!" shrieked a voice above the shouting of the storm,—"*she is coming!*" . . . It was true. Down the Atchafalaya, and thence through strange mazes of bayou, lakelet, and pass, by a rear route familiar only to the best of pilots, the frail river-craft had toiled into Caillou Bay, running close to the main

shore;—and now she was heading right for the island, with the wind aft, over the monstrous sea. On she came, swaying, rocking, plunging,—with a great whiteness wrapping her about like a cloud, and moving with her moving,—a tempest-whirl of spray;—ghost-white and like a ghost she came, for her smoke-stacks exhaled no visible smoke—the wind devoured it! The excitement on shore became wild;—men shouted themselves hoarse; women laughed and cried. Every telescope and opera-glass was directed upon the coming apparition; all wondered how the pilot kept his feet; all marvelled at the madness of the captain.

But Captain Abraham Smith was not mad. A veteran American sailor, he had learned to know the great Gulf as scholars know deep books by heart: he knew the birthplace of its tempests, the mystery of

its tides, the omens of its hurricanes. While lying at Brashear City he felt the storm had not yet reached its highest, vaguely foresaw a mighty peril, and resolved to wait no longer for a lull. "Boys," he said, "we've got to take her out in spite of Hell!" And they "took her out." Through all the peril, his men stayed by him and obeyed him. By mid-morning the wind had deepened to a roar, —lowering sometimes to a rumble, sometimes bursting upon the ears like a measureless and deafening crash. Then the captain knew the *Star* was running a race with Death. "She'll win it," he muttered; "she'll stand it.... Perhaps they'll have need of me to-night."

She won! With a sonorous steam-chant of triumph the brave little vessel rode at last into the bayou, and anchored hard by her accustomed resting-place, in

full view of the hotel, though not near enough to shore to lower her gang-plank. . . . But she had sung her swan-song. Gathering in from the northeast, the waters of the bay were already marbling over the salines and half across the island; and still the wind increased its paroxysmal power.

Cottages began to rock. Some slid away from the solid props upon which they rested. A chimney tumbled. Shutters were wrenched off; verandas demolished. Light roofs lifted, dropped again, and flapped into ruin. Trees bent their heads to the earth. And still the storm grew louder and blacker with every passing hour.

The *Star* rose with the rising of the waters, dragging her anchor. Two more anchors were put out, and still she dragged —dragged in with the flood,—twisting,

shuddering, careening in her agony. Evening fell; the sand began to move with the wind, stinging faces like a continuous fire of fine shot; and frenzied blasts came to buffet the steamer forward, sideward. Then one of her hog-chains parted with a clang like the boom of a big bell. Then another! . . . Then the captain bade his men to cut away all her upper works, clean to the deck. Overboard into the seething went her stacks, her pilot-house, her cabins,—and whirled away. And the naked hull of the *Star*, still dragging her three anchors, labored on through the darkness, nearer and nearer to the immense silhouette of the hotel, whose hundred windows were now all aflame. The vast timber building seemed to defy the storm. The wind, roaring round its broad verandas,—hissing through every crevice with the sound

and force of steam,—appeared to waste its rage. And in the half-lull between two terrible gusts there came to the captain's ears a sound that seemed strange in that night of multitudinous terrors . . . a sound of music!

VI.

. . . Almost every evening throughout the season there had been dancing in the great hall;—there was dancing that night also. The population of the hotel had been augmented by the advent of families from other parts of the island, who found their summer cottages insecure places of shelter: there were nearly four hundred guests assembled. Perhaps it was for this reason that the entertainment had been prepared upon a grander plan than usual, that it assumed the form of a fashionable ball. And all those pleasure-

seekers,—representing the wealth and beauty of the Creole parishes,—whether from Ascension or Assumption, St. Mary's or St. Landry's, Iberville or Terrebonne, whether inhabitants of the multi-colored and many-balconied Creole quarter of the quaint metropolis, or dwellers in the dreamy paradises of the Têche,—mingled joyously, knowing each other, feeling in some sort akin—whether affiliated by blood, connaturalized by caste, or simply interassociated by traditional sympathies of class sentiment and class interest. Perhaps in the more than ordinary merriment of that evening something of nervous exaltation might have been discerned,—something like a feverish resolve to oppose apprehension with gayety, to combat uneasiness by diversion. But the hours passed in mirthfulness; the first general feeling of depression began to

weigh less and less upon the guests; they had found reason to confide in the solidity of the massive building; there were no positive terrors, no outspoken fears; and the new conviction of all had found expression in the words of the host himself,—"*Il n'y a rien de mieux à faire que de s'amuser!*" Of what avail to lament the prospective devastation of cane-fields, —to discuss the possible ruin of crops? Better to seek solace in choregraphic harmonies, in the rhythm of gracious motion and of perfect melody, than hearken to the discords of the wild orchestra of storms;—wiser to admire the grace of Parisian toilets, the eddy of trailing robes with its fairy-foam of lace, the ivorine loveliness of glossy shoulders and jewelled throats, the glimmering of satin-slippered feet,—than to watch the raging of the flood without, or the flying of the wrack. . . .

So the music and the mirth went on: they made joy for themselves—those elegant guests;—they jested and sipped rich wines;—they pledged, and hoped, and loved, and promised, with never a thought of the morrow, on the night of the tenth of August, eighteen hundred and fifty-six. Observant parents were there, planning for the future bliss of their nearest and dearest;—mothers and fathers of handsome lads, lithe and elegant as young pines, and fresh from the polish of foreign university training;—mothers and fathers of splendid girls whose simplest attitudes were witcheries. Young cheeks flushed, young hearts fluttered with an emotion more puissant than the excitement of the dance;—young eyes betrayed the happy secret discreeter lips would have preserved. Slave-servants circled through the aristocratic press, bearing

dainties and wines, praying permission to pass in terms at once humble and officious,—always in the excellent French which well-trained house-servants were taught to use on such occasions.

. . . Night wore on: still the shining floor palpitated to the feet of the dancers; still the piano-forte pealed, and still the violins sang,—and the sound of their singing shrilled through the darkness, in gasps of the gale, to the ears of Captain Smith, as he strove to keep his footing on the spray-drenched deck of the *Star*.

—"Christ!" he muttered,—"a dance! If that wind whips round south, there'll be another dance! . . . But I guess the *Star* will stay.". . .

Half an hour might have passed; still the lights flamed calmly, and the violins trilled, and the perfumed whirl went on. . . . And suddenly the wind veered!

Again the *Star* reeled, and shuddered, and turned, and began to drag all her anchors. But she now dragged away from the great building and its lights,—away from the voluptuous thunder of the grand piano,—even at that moment outpouring the great joy of Weber's melody orchestrated by Berlioz: *l'Invitation à la Valse*,—with its marvellous musical swing!"

—"Waltzing!" cried the captain. "God help them!—God help us all now!.... *The Wind waltzes to-night, with the Sea for his partner!*"...

O the stupendous Valse-Tourbillon! O the mighty Dancer! One—two—three! From northeast to east, from east to southeast, from southeast to south: then from the south he came, whirling the Sea in his arms....

. . . Some one shrieked in the midst of the revels;—some girl who found her pretty slippers wet. What could it be? Thin streams of water were spreading over the level planking,—curling about the feet of the dancers. . . . What could it be? All the land had begun to quake, even as, but a moment before, the polished floor was trembling to the pressure of circling steps;—all the building shook now; every beam uttered its groan. What could it be? . . .

There was a clamor, a panic, a rush to the windy night. Infinite darkness above and beyond; but the lantern-beams danced far out over an unbroken circle of heaving and swirling black water. Stealthily, swiftly, the measureless sea-flood was rising.

—"*Messieurs—mesdames, ce n'est rien.* Nothing serious, ladies, I assure you. . . .

Mais nous en avons vu bien souvent, les inondations comme celle-ci; ça passe vite! The water will go down in a few hours, ladies;—it never rises higher than this; *il n'y a pas le moindre danger, je vous dis! Allons! il n'y a—* My God! what is that?"...

For a moment there was a ghastly hush of voices. And through that hush there burst upon the ears of all a fearful and unfamiliar sound, as of a colossal cannonade—rolling up from the south, with volleying lightnings. Vastly and swiftly, nearer and nearer it came,—a ponderous and unbroken thunder-roll, terrible as the long muttering of an earthquake.

The nearest mainland,—across mad Caillou Bay to the sea-marshes,—lay twelve miles north; west, by the Gulf, the nearest solid ground was twenty miles distant. There were boats, yes!—but the

stoutest swimmer might never reach them now!...

Then rose a frightful cry,—the hoarse, hideous, indescribable cry of hopeless fear, —the despairing animal-cry man utters when suddenly brought face to face with Nothingness, without preparation, without consolation, without possibility of respite.... *Sauve qui peut!* Some wrenched down the doors; some clung to the heavy banquet-tables, to the sofas, to the billiard-tables:—during one terrible instant,—against fruitless heroisms, against futile generosities,—raged all the frenzy of selfishness, all the brutalities of panic. And then—then came, thundering through the blackness, the giant swells, boom on boom!.... One crash!—the huge frame building rocks like a cradle, seesaws, crackles. What are human shrieks now? —the tornado is shrieking! Another!—

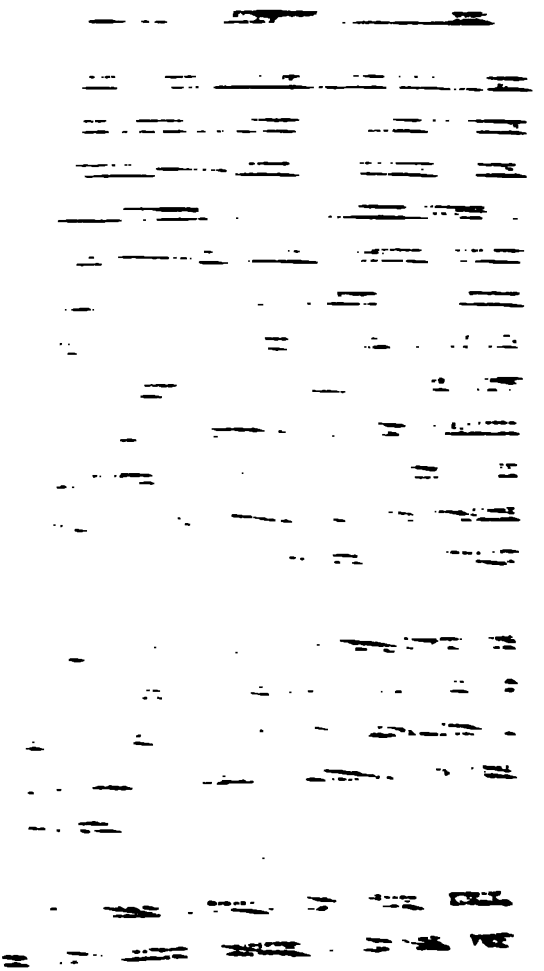
chandeliers splinter; lights are dashed out; a sweeping cataract hurls in: the immense hall rises,—oscillates,—twirls as upon a pivot,—crepitates,—crumbles into ruin. Crash again!—the swirling wreck dissolves into the wallowing of another monster billow; and a hundred cottages overturn, spin in sudden eddies, quiver, disjoint, and melt into the seething.

. . . So the hurricane passed,—tearing off the heads of the prodigious waves, to hurl them a hundred feet in air,—heaping up the ocean against the land,—upturning the woods. Bays and passes were swollen to abysses; rivers regorged; the sea-marshes were changed to raging wastes of water. Before New Orleans the flood of the mile-broad Mississippi rose six feet above highest water-mark. One hundred and ten miles away, Donaldsonville trembled at the towering tide

of the Lafourche. Lakes strove to burst their boundaries. Far-off river steamers tugged wildly at their cables,—shivering like tethered creatures that hear by night the approaching howl of destroyers. Smoke-stacks were hurled overboard, pilot-houses torn away, cabins blown to fragments.

And over roaring Kaimbuck Pass,—over the agony of Caillou Bay,—the billowing tide rushed unresisted from the Gulf,—tearing and swallowing the land in its course,—ploughing out deep-sea channels where sleek herds had been grazing but a few hours before,—rending islands in twain,—and ever bearing with it, through the night, enormous vortex of wreck and vast wan drift of corpses. . . .

But the *Star* remained. And Captain Abraham Smith, with a long, good rope



the low land made vast with desolation. It is a spectral dawn: a wan light, like the light of a dying sun.

The wind has waned and veered; the flood sinks slowly back to its abysses—abandoning its plunder,—scattering its piteous waifs over bar and dune, over shoal and marsh, among the silences of the mango-swamps, over the long low reaches of sand-grasses and drowned weeds, for more than a hundred miles. From the shell-reefs of Pointe-au-Fer to the shallows of Pelto Bay the dead lie mingled with the high-heaped drift;—from their cypress groves the vultures rise to dispute a share of the feast with the shrieking frigate-birds and squeaking gulls. And as the tremendous tide withdraws its plunging waters, all the pirates of air follow the great white-gleaming retreat: a storm of billowing wings and screaming throats.

And swift in the wake of gull and frigate-bird the Wreckers come, the Spoilers of the dead,—savage skimmers of the sea,—hurricane-riders wont to spread their canvas-pinions in the face of storms; Sicilian and Corsican outlaws, Manila-men from the marshes, deserters from many navies, Lascars, marooners, refugees of a hundred nationalities,—fishers and shrimpers by name, smugglers by opportunity,—wild channel-finders from obscure bayous and unfamiliar *chénières*, all skilled in the mysteries of these mysterious waters beyond the comprehension of the oldest licensed pilot. . . .

There is plunder for all—birds and men. There are drowned sheep in multitude, heaped carcasses of kine. There are casks of claret and kegs of brandy and legions of bottles bobbing in the surf. There are billiard-tables overturned upon the sand;

—there are sofas, pianos, footstools and music-stools, luxurious chairs, lounges of bamboo. There are chests of cedar, and toilet-tables of rosewood, and trunks of fine stamped leather stored with precious apparel. There are *objets de luxe* innumerable. There are children's playthings: French dolls in marvellous toilets, and toy carts, and wooden horses, and wooden spades, and brave little wooden ships that rode out the gale in which the great *Nautilus* went down. There is money in notes and in coin—in purses, in pocket-books, and in pockets: plenty of it! There are silks, satins, laces, and fine linen to be stripped from the bodies of the drowned, —and necklaces, bracelets, watches, finger-rings and fine chains, brooches and trinkets. . . . "*Chi bidizza!—Oh! chi bedda mughieri! Eccu, la bidizza!*" That ball-dress was made in Paris by— But

you never heard of him, Sicilian Vicenzu. . . . "*Che bella sposina!*" Her betrothal ring will not come off, Giuseppe; but the delicate bone snaps easily: your oyster-knife can sever the tendon. . . . "*Guardate! chi bedda picciota!*" Over her heart you will find it, Valentino—the locket held by that fine Swiss chain of woven hair—"*Caya manan!*" And it is not your quadroon bondsmaid, sweet lady, who now disrobes you so roughly; those Malay hands are less deft than hers,—but she slumbers very far away from you, and may not be aroused from her sleep. "*Na quita mo! dalaga!—na quita maganda!*". . . Juan, the fastenings of those diamond ear-drops are much too complicated for your peon fingers: tear them out!—"*Dispense, chulita!*". . .

. . . Suddenly a long, mighty silver trilling fills the ears of all: there is a

wild hurrying and scurrying; swiftly, one after another, the overburdened luggers spread wings and flutter away.

Thrice the great cry rings rippling through the gray air, and over the green sea, and over the far-flooded shell-reefs, where the huge white flashes are,—sheet-lightning of breakers,—and over the weird wash of corpses coming in.

It is the steam-call of the relief-boat, hastening to rescue the living, to gather in the dead.

The tremendous tragedy is over!

PART II.

Out of the Sea's Strength.

OUT OF THE SEA'S STRENGTH.

I.

THERE are regions of Louisiana coast whose aspect seems not of the present, but of the immemorial past —of that epoch when low flat reaches of primordial continent first rose into form above a Silurian Sea. To indulge this geologic dream, any fervid and breezeless day there, it is only necessary to ignore the evolutional protests of a few blue asters or a few composite flowers of the *coryopsis* sort, which contrive to display their rare flashes of color through the general waving of cat-heads, blood-weeds, wild cane, and marsh grasses. For, at a hasty glance, the general appearance of

this marsh verdure is vague enough, as it ranges away towards the sand, to convey the idea of amphibious vegetation, —a primitive flora as yet undecided whether to retain marine habits and forms, or to assume terrestrial ones;— and the occasional inspection of surprising shapes might strengthen this fancy. Queer flat-lying and many-branching things, which resemble sea-weeds in juiciness and color and consistency, crackle under your feet from time to time; the moist and weighty air seems heated rather from below than from above,—less by the sun than by the radiation of a cooling world; and the mists of morning or evening appear to simulate the vapory exhalation of volcanic forces,—latent, but only dozing, and uncomfortably close to the surface. And indeed geologists have actually averred that those rare eleva-

tions of the soil,—which, with their heavy coronets of evergreen foliage, not only look like islands, but are so called in the French nomenclature of the coast,—have been prominences created by ancient mud volcanoes.

The family of a Spanish fisherman, Feliu Viosca, once occupied and gave its name to such an islet, quite close to the Gulf-shore,—the loftiest bit of land along fourteen miles of just such marshy coast as I have spoken of. Landward, it dominated a desolation that wearied the eye to look at, a wilderness of reedy sloughs, patched at intervals with ranges of bitter-weed, tufts of elbow-bushes, and broad reaches of saw-grass, stretching away to a bluish-green line of woods that closed the horizon, and imperfectly drained in the driest season by a slimy little bayou that continually vomited foul water into

the sea. The point had been much discussed by geologists; it proved a godsend to United States surveyors weary of attempting to take observations among quagmires, moccasins, and arborescent weeds from fifteen to twenty feet high. Savage fishermen, at some unrecorded time, had heaped upon the eminence a hill of clam-shells,—refuse of a million feasts; earth again had been formed over these, perhaps by the blind agency of worms working through centuries unnumbered; and the new soil had given birth to a luxuriant vegetation. Millennial oaks interknotted their roots below its surface, and vouchsafed protection to many a frailer growth of shrub or tree, —wild orange, water-willow, palmetto, locust, pomegranate, and many trailing tendrilled things, both green and gray. Then, —perhaps about half a century ago,—a

few white fishermen cleared a place for themselves in this grove, and built a few palmetto cottages, with boat-houses and a wharf, facing the bayou. Later on this temporary fishing station became a permanent settlement: homes constructed of heavy timber and plaster mixed with the trailing moss of the oaks and cypresses took the places of the frail and fragrant huts of palmetto. Still the population itself retained a floating character: it ebbed and came, according to season and circumstances, according to luck or loss in the tilling of the sea. Viosca, the founder of the settlement, always remained; he always managed to do well. He owned several luggers and sloops, which were hired out upon excellent terms; he could make large and profitable contracts with New Orleans fish-dealers; and he was vaguely suspected of

possessing more occult resources. There were some confused stories current about his having once been a daring smuggler, and having only been reformed by the pleadings of his wife Carmen,—a little brown woman who had followed him from Barcelona to share his fortunes in the western world.

On hot days, when the shade was full of thin sweet scents, the place had a tropical charm, a drowsy peace. Nothing except the peculiar appearance of the line of oaks facing the Gulf could have conveyed to the visitor any suggestion of days in which the trilling of crickets and the fluting of birds had ceased, of nights when the voices of the marsh had been hushed for fear. In one enormous rank the veteran trees stood shoulder to shoulder, but in the attitude of giants overmastered,—forced backward towards the

marsh,—made to recoil by the might of the ghostly enemy with whom they had striven a thousand years,—the Shrieker, the Sky-Sweeper, the awful Sea-Wind!

Never had he given them so terrible a wrestle as on the night of the tenth of August, eighteen hundred and fifty-six. All the waves of the excited Gulf thronged in as if to see, and lifted up their voices, and pushed, and roared, until the *chénière* was islanded by such a billowing as no white man's eyes had ever looked upon before. Grandly the oaks bore themselves, but every fibre of their knotted thews was strained in the unequal contest, and two of the giants were overthrown, upturning, as they fell, roots coiled and huge as the serpent-limbs of Titans. Moved to its entrails, all the islet trembled, while the sea magnified its menace, and reached out whitely to the

prostrate trees; but the rest of the oaks stood on, and strove in line, and saved the habitations defended by them. . . .

II.

Before a little waxen image of the Mother and Child,—an odd little Virgin with an Indian face, brought home by Feliu as a gift after one of his Mexican voyages,— Carmen Viosca had burned candles and prayed; sometimes telling her beads; sometimes murmuring the litanies she knew by heart; sometimes also reading from a prayer-book worn and greasy as a long-used pack of cards. It was particularly stained at one page, a page on which her tears had fallen many a lonely night—a page with a clumsy wood-cut representing a celestial lamp, a symbolic radiance, shining through darkness, and on either side a kneeling angel

with folded wings. And beneath this rudely wrought symbol of the Perpetual Calm appeared in big, coarse type the title of a prayer that has been offered up through many a century, doubtless, by wives of Spanish mariners,—*Contra las Tempestades.*

Once she became very much frightened. After a partial lull the storm had suddenly redoubled its force: the ground shook; the house quivered and creaked; the wind brayed and screamed and pushed and scuffled at the door; and the water, which had been whipping in through every crevice, all at once rose over the threshold and flooded the dwelling. Carmen dipped her finger in the water and tasted it. It was salt!

And none of Feliu's boats had yet come in;—doubtless they had been driven into some far-away bayous by the storm. The

only boat at the settlement, the *Carmencita*, had been almost wrecked by running upon a snag three days before;—there was at least a fortnight's work for the ship-carpenter of Dead Cypress Point. And Feliu was sleeping as if nothing unusual had happened—the heavy sleep of a sailor, heedless of commotions and voices. And his men, Miguel and Mateo, were at the other end of the *chénière*.

With a scream Carmen aroused Feliu. He raised himself upon his elbow, rubbed his eyes, and asked her, with exasperating calmness, "*Que tienes? que tienes?*" (What ails thee?)

—"Oh, Feliu! the sea is coming upon us!" she answered, in the same tongue. But she screamed out a word inspired by her fear: she did not cry, "*Se nos viene el mar encima!*" but "*Se nos viene* LA ALTURA!"—the name that conveys the

terrible thought of depth swallowed up in height,—the height of the *high sea.*

"*No lo creo!*" muttered Feliu, looking at the floor; then in a quiet, deep voice he said, pointing to an oar in the corner of the room, "*Echame ese remo.*"

She gave it to him. Still reclining upon one elbow, Feliu measured the depth of the water with his thumb-nail upon the blade of the oar, and then bade Carmen light his pipe for him. His calmness reassured her. For half an hour more, undismayed by the clamoring of the wind or the calling of the sea, Feliu silently smoked his pipe and watched his oar. The water rose a little higher, and he made another mark;—then it climbed a little more, but not so rapidly; and he smiled at Carmen as he made a third mark. "*Como creia!*" he exclaimed, "*no hay porque asustarse: el agua baja!*"

And as Carmen would have continued to pray, he rebuked her fears, and bade her try to obtain some rest: "*Basta ya de plegarios, querida!—vete y duerme.*" His tone, though kindly, was imperative; and Carmen, accustomed to obey him, laid herself down by his side, and soon, for very weariness, slept.

It was a feverish sleep, nevertheless, shattered at brief intervals by terrible sounds,—sounds magnified by her nervous condition—a sleep visited by dreams that mingled in a strange way with the impressions of the storm, and more than once made her heart stop, and start again at its own stopping. One of these fancies she never could forget—a dream about little Concha,—Conchita, her first-born, who now slept far away in the old churchyard at Barcelona. She had tried to become resigned,—not to think.

But the child would come back night after night, though the earth lay heavy upon her—night after night, through long distances of Time and Space. Oh! the fancied clinging of infant-lips!—the thrilling touch of little ghostly hands!—those phantom-caresses that torture mothers' hearts! . . . Night after night, through many a month of pain. Then for a time the gentle presence ceased to haunt her,—seemed to have lain down to sleep forever under the high bright grass and yellow flowers. Why did it return, that night of all nights, to kiss her, to cling to her, to nestle in her arms? . . .

For in her dream she thought herself still kneeling before the waxen Image, while the terrors of the tempest were ever deepening about her,—raving of winds and booming of waters and a shaking of the land. And before her, even as she

prayed her dream-prayer, the waxen Virgin became tall as a woman, and taller,—rising to the roof and smiling as she grew. Then Carmen would have cried out for fear, but that something smothered her voice,—paralyzed her tongue. And the Virgin silently stooped above her, and placed in her arms the Child,—the brown Child with the Indian face. And the Child whitened in her hands and changed,—seeming as it changed to send a sharp pain through her heart: an old pain linked somehow with memories of bright windy Spanish hills, and summer-scent of olive groves, and all the luminous Past;—it looked into her face with the soft dark gaze, with the unforgotten smile of . . . dead Conchita!

And Carmen wished to thank the smiling Virgin for that priceless bliss, and lifted up her eyes; but the sickness of

ghostly fear returned upon her when she looked; for now the Mother seemed as a woman long dead, and the smile was the smile of fleshlessness, and the places of the eyes were voids and darknesses. . . . And the sea sent up so vast a roar that the dwelling rocked.

Carmen started from sleep to find her heart throbbing so that the couch shook with it. Night was growing gray; the door had just been opened and slammed again. Through the rain-whipped panes she discerned the passing shape of Feliu, making for the beach—a broad and bearded silhouette, bending against the wind. Still the waxen Virgin smiled her Mexican smile,—but now she was only seven inches high; and her bead-glass eyes seemed to twinkle with kindliness while the flame of the last expiring taper struggled for life in the earthen socket at her feet.

III.

Rain and a blind sky and a bursting sea. Feliu and his men, Miguel and Mateo, looked out upon the thundering and flashing of the monstrous tide. The wind had fallen, and the gray air was full of gulls. Behind the *chénière*, back to the cloudy line of low woods many miles away, stretched a wash of lead-colored water, with a green point piercing it here and there—elbow-bushes or wild cane tall enough to keep their heads above the flood. But the inundation was visibly decreasing;—with the passing of each hour more and more green patches and points had been showing themselves: by degrees the course of the bayou had become defined—two parallel winding lines of dwarf-timber and bushy shrubs traversing the water toward the distant cy-

press-swamps. Before the *chénière* all the shell-beach slope was piled with wreck —uptorn trees with the foliage still fresh upon them, splintered timbers of mysterious origin, and logs in multitude, scarred with gashes of the axe. Feliu and his comrades had saved wood enough to build a little town,—working up to their waists in the surf, with ropes, poles, and boat-hooks. The whole sea was full of flotsam. *Voto á Cristo!*—what a wrecking there must have been! And to think the *Carmencita* could not be taken out!

They had seen other luggers making eastward during the morning—could recognize some by their sails, others by their gait,—exaggerated in their struggle with the pitching of the sea: the *San Pablo*, the *Gasparina*, the *Enriqueta*, the *Agueda*, the *Constanza*. Ugly water, yes!—but what a chance for wreckers!... Some

great ship must have gone to pieces;—scores of casks were rolling in the trough,—casks of wine. Perhaps it was the *Manila*,—perhaps the *Nautilus!*

A dead cow floated near enough for Mateo to throw his rope over one horn; and they all helped to get it out. It was a milch cow of some expensive breed; and the owner's brand had been burned upon the horns:—a monographic combination of the letters A and P. Feliu said he knew that brand: Old-man Preaulx, of Belle-Isle, who kept a sort of dairy at Last Island during the summer season, used to mark all his cows that way. Strange!

But, as they worked on, they began to see stranger things,—white dead faces and dead hands, which did not look like the hands or the faces of drowned sailors: the ebb was beginning to run strongly, and these were passing out with it on the

other side of the mouth of the bayou;—perhaps they had been washed into the marsh during the night, when the great rush of the sea came. Then the three men left the water, and retired to higher ground to scan the furrowed Gulf;—their practised eyes began to search the courses of the sea-currents,—keen as the gaze of birds that watch the wake of the plough. And soon the casks and the drift were forgotten; for it seemed to them that the tide was heavy with human dead—passing out, processionally, to the great open. Very far, where the huge pitching of the swells was diminished by distance into a mere fluttering of ripples, the water appeared as if sprinkled with them;—they vanished and became visible again at irregular intervals, here and there—floating most thickly eastward,—tossing, swaying patches of white or pink or blue or black,

each with its tiny speck of flesh-color showing as the sea lifted or lowered the body. Nearer to shore there were few; but of these two were close enough to be almost recognizable: Miguel first discerned them. They were rising and falling where the water was deepest—well out in front of the mouth of the bayou, beyond the flooded sand-bars, and moving toward the shell-reef westward. They were drifting almost side by side. One was that of a negro, apparently well attired, and wearing a white apron;—the other seemed to be a young colored girl, clad in a blue dress; she was floating upon her face; they could observe that she had nearly straight hair, braided and tied with a red ribbon. These were evidently house-servants,—slaves. But from whence? Nothing could be learned until the luggers should return; and none of

them was yet in sight. Still Feliu was not anxious as to the fate of his boats, manned by the best sailors of the coast. Rarely are these Louisiana fishermen lost in sudden storms; even when to other eyes the appearances are most pacific and the skies most splendidly blue, they divine some far-off danger, like the gulls; and like the gulls also, you see their light vessels fleeing landward. These men seem living barometers, exquisitely sensitive to all the invisible changes of atmospheric expansion and compression; they are not easily caught in those awful dead calms which suddenly paralyze the wings of a bark, and hold her helpless in their charmed circle, as in a nightmare, until the blackness overtakes her, and the long-sleeping sea leaps up foaming to devour her.

—"*Carajo!*"

The word all at once bursts from Feliu's mouth, with that peculiar guttural snarl of the "r" betokening strong excitement,—while he points to something rocking in the ebb, beyond the foaming of the shell-reef, under a circling of gulls. More dead? Yes—but something too that lives and moves, like a quivering speck of gold; and Mateo also perceives it, a gleam of bright hair,—and Miguel likewise, after a moment's gazing. A living child;—a lifeless mother. *Pobrecíta!* No boat within reach, and only a mighty surf-wrestler could hope to swim thither and return!

But already, without a word, brown Feliu has stripped for the struggle;—another second, and he is shooting through the surf, head and hands tunnelling the foam-hills.... One—two—three lines passed!—four!—that is where they first begin to

crumble white from the summit,—five! —that he can ride fearlessly! . . . Then swiftly, easily, he advances, with a long, powerful breast-stroke,—keeping his bearded head well up to watch for drift, —seeming to slide with a swing from swell to swell,—ascending, sinking,—alternately presenting breast or shoulder to the wave; always diminishing more and more to the eyes of Mateo and Miguel,— till he becomes a moving speck, occasionally hard to follow through the confusion of heaping waters. . . . You are not afraid of the sharks, Feliu!—no: they are afraid of you; right and left they slunk away from your coming that morning you swam for life in West-Indian waters, with your knife in your teeth, while the balls of the Cuban coast-guard were purring all around you. That day the swarming sea was warm,—warm like soup—and clear, with

an emerald flash in every ripple,—not opaque and clamorous like the Gulf to-day. . . . Miguel and his comrade are anxious. Ropes are unrolled and inter-knotted into a line. Miguel remains on the beach; but Mateo, bearing the end of the line, fights his way out,—swimming and wading by turns, to the further sand-bar, where the water is shallow enough to stand in,—if you know how to jump when the breaker comes.

But Feliu, nearing the flooded shell-bank, watches the white flashings,—knows when the time comes to keep flat and take a long, long breath. One heavy volleying of foam,—darkness and hissing as of a steam-burst; a vibrant lifting up; a rush into light,—and again the volleying and the seething darkness. Once more,—and the fight is won! He feels the upcoming chill of deeper water,—sees before him

the green quaking of unbroken swells,—and far beyond him Mateo leaping on the bar,—and beside him, almost within arm's-reach, a great billiard-table swaying, and a dead woman clinging there, and .... the child.

A moment more, and Feliu has lifted himself beside the waifs.... How fast the dead woman clings, as if with the one power which is strong as death,—the desperate force of love! Not in vain; for the frail creature bound to the mother's corpse with a silken scarf has still the strength to cry out:—"*Maman! maman!*" But time is life now; and the tiny hands must be pulled away from the fair dead neck, and the scarf taken to bind the infant firmly to Feliu's broad shoulders,—quickly, roughly; for the ebb will not wait....

And now Feliu has a burden; but his

style of swimming has totally changed;—he rises from the water like a Triton, and his powerful arms seem to spin in circles, like the spokes of a flying wheel. For now is the wrestle indeed!—after each passing swell comes a prodigious pulling from beneath,—the sea clutching for its prey. But the reef is gained, is passed;—the wild horses of the deep seem to know the swimmer who has learned to ride them so well. And still the brown arms spin in an ever-nearing mist of spray; and the outer sand-bar is not far off,—and there is shouting Mateo, leaping in the surf, swinging something about his head, as a vaquero swings his noose! . . . . Sough! splash!—it struggles in the trough beside Feliu, and the sinewy hand descends upon it. *Tiene!—tira, Miguel!* And their feet touch land again! . . .

She is very cold, the child, and very still, with eyes closed.

—"*Esta muerta, Feliu?*" asks Mateo.

—"*No!*" the panting swimmer makes answer, emerging, while the waves reach whitely up the sand as in pursuit,—"*no; vive!—respira todavía!*"

Behind him the deep lifts up its million hands, and thunders as in acclaim.

IV.

—"*Madre de Dios!—mi sueno!*" screamed Carmen, abandoning her preparations for the morning meal, as Feliu, nude, like a marine god, rushed in and held out to her a dripping and gasping baby-girl,—"Mother of God! my dream!" But there was no time then to tell of dreams; the child might die. In one instant Carmen's quick, deft hands had stripped the slender little body; and while

Mateo and Feliu were finding dry clothing and stimulants, and Miguel telling how it all happened—quickly, passionately, with furious gesture,—the kind and vigorous woman exerted all her skill to revive the flickering life. Soon Feliu came to aid her, while his men set to work completing the interrupted preparation of the breakfast. Flannels were heated for the friction of the frail limbs; and brandy-and-water warmed, which Carmen administered by the spoonful, skilfully as any physician,—until, at last, the little creature opened her eyes and began to sob. Sobbing still, she was laid in Carmen's warm feather-bed, well swathed in woollen wrappings. The immediate danger, at least, was over; and Feliu smiled with pride and pleasure.

Then Carmen first ventured to relate her dream; and his face became grave

again. Husband and wife gazed a moment into each other's eyes, feeling together the same strange thrill—that mysterious faint creeping, as of a wind passing, which is the awe of the Unknowable. Then they looked at the child, lying there, pink-cheeked with the flush of the blood returning; and such a sudden tenderness touched them as they had known long years before, while together bending above the slumbering loveliness of lost Conchita.

—"*Que ojos!*" murmured Feliu, as he turned away,—feigning hunger. . . . (He was not hungry; but his sight had grown a little dim, as with a mist.) *Que ojos!* They were singular eyes, large, dark, and wonderfully fringed. The child's hair was yellow—it was the flash of it that had saved her; yet her eyes and brows were beautifully black. She was comely, but with such a curious, delicate comeli-

ness—totally unlike the robust beauty of Concha. . . . At intervals she would moan a little between her sobs; and at last cried out, with a thin, shrill cry: "Maman!—oh! maman!" Then Carmen lifted her from the bed to her lap, and caressed her, and rocked her gently to and fro, as she had done many a night for Concha,—murmuring,—"*Yo seré tu madre, angel mio, dulzura mia;—seré tu madrecita, palomita mia!*" (I will be thy mother, my angel, my sweet;—I will be thy little mother, my doveling.) And the long silk fringes of the child's eyes overlapped, shadowed her little cheeks; and she slept—just as Conchita had slept long ago,—with her head on Carmen's bosom.

Feliu re-appeared at the inner door: at a sign, he approached cautiously, without noise, and looked.

—"She can talk," whispered Carmen in

Spanish: "she called her mother"—*ha llamado à su madre.*

—"*Y Dios tambien la ha llamado,*" responded Feliu, with rude pathos;—"And *God also called her.*"

—"But the Virgin sent us the child, Feliu,—sent us the child for Concha's sake."

He did not answer at once; he seemed to be thinking very deeply;—Carmen anxiously scanned his impassive face.

—"Who knows?" he answered, at last; —"who knows? Perhaps she has ceased to belong to any one else." . . .

One after another, Feliu's luggers fluttered in,—bearing with them news of the immense calamity. And all the fishermen, in turn, looked at the child. Not one had ever seen her before.

V.

Ten days later, a lugger full of armed men entered the bayou, and moored at Viosca's wharf. The visitors were, for the most part, country gentlemen,—residents of Franklin and neighboring towns, or planters from the Têche country,—forming one of the numerous expeditions organized for the purpose of finding the bodies of relatives or friends lost in the great hurricane, and of punishing the robbers of the dead. They had searched numberless nooks of the coast, had given sepulture to many corpses, had recovered a large amount of jewelry, and—as Feliu afterward learned,—had summarily tried and executed several of the most abandoned class of wreckers found with ill-gotten valuables in their possession, and convicted of having mutilated the drowned.

But they came to Viosca's landing only to obtain information;—he was too well known and liked to be a subject for suspicion; and, moreover, he had one good friend in the crowd,—Captain Harris of New Orleans, a veteran steamboat man and a market-contractor, to whom he had disposed of many a cargo of fresh *pompano*, sheep's-head, and Spanish-mackerel. . . . Harris was the first to step to land;—some ten of the party followed him. Nearly all had lost some relative or friend in the great catastrophe;—the gathering was serious, silent,—almost grim,—which formed about Feliu.

Mateo, who had come to the country while a boy, spoke English better than the rest of the *chénière* people;—he acted as interpreter whenever Feliu found any difficulty in comprehending or answering questions; and he told them of the child

rescued that wild morning, and of Feliu's swim. His recital evoked a murmur of interest and excitement, followed by a confusion of questions. Well, they could see for themselves, Feliu said; but he hoped they would have a little patience;—the child was still weak;—it might be dangerous to startle her. "We'll arrange it just as you like," responded the captain;—"go ahead, Feliu!" . . .

All proceeded to the house, under the great trees; Feliu and Captain Harris leading the way. It was sultry and bright;—even the sea-breeze was warm; there were pleasant odors in the shade, and a soporific murmur made of leaf-speech and the hum of gnats. Only the captain entered the house with Feliu; the rest remained without—some taking seats on a rude plank bench under the oaks—others flinging themselves down upon the weeds

—a few stood still, leaning upon their rifles. Then Carmen came out to them with gourds and a bucket of fresh water, which all were glad to drink.

They waited many minutes. Perhaps it was the cool peace of the place that made them all feel how hot and tired they were: conversation flagged; and the general languor finally betrayed itself in a silence so absolute that every leaf-whisper seemed to become separately audible.

It was broken at last by the guttural voice of the old captain emerging from the cottage, leading the child by the hand, and followed by Carmen and Feliu. All who had been resting rose up and looked at the child.

Standing in a lighted space, with one tiny hand enveloped by the captain's great brown fist, she looked so lovely that a general exclamation of surprise went up.

Her bright hair, loose and steeped in the sun-flame, illuminated her like a halo; and her large dark eyes, gentle and melancholy as a deer's, watched the strange faces before her with shy curiosity. She wore the same dress in which Feliu had found her—a soft white fabric of muslin, with trimmings of ribbon that had once been blue; and the now discolored silken scarf, which had twice done her such brave service, was thrown over her shoulders. Carmen had washed and repaired the dress very creditably; but the tiny slim feet were bare,—the brine-soaked shoes she wore that fearful night had fallen into shreds at the first attempt to remove them.

—"Gentlemen," said Captain Harris,—"we can find no clew to the identity of this child. There is no mark upon her clothing; and she wore nothing in the

shape of jewelry—except this string of coral beads. We are nearly all Americans here; and she does not speak any English. . . . Does any one here know anything about her?"

Carmen felt a great sinking at her heart: was her new-found darling to be taken so soon from her? But no answer came to the captain's query. No one of the expedition had ever seen that child before. The coral beads were passed from hand to hand; the scarf was minutely scrutinized without avail. Somebody asked if the child could not talk German or Italian.

—"*Italiano? No!*" said Feliu, shaking his head. . . . One of his luggermen, Gioachino Sparicio, who, though a Sicilian, could speak several Italian idioms besides his own, had already essayed.

—"She speaks something or other,"

answered the captain—"but no English. I couldn't make her understand me; and Feliu, who talks nearly all the infernal languages spoken down this way, says he can't make her understand him. Suppose some of you who know French talk to her a bit. . . . Laroussel, why don't you try?"

The young man addressed did not at first seem to notice the captain's suggestion. He was a tall, lithe fellow, with a dark, positive face: he had never removed his black gaze from the child since the moment of her appearance. Her eyes, too, seemed to be all for him—to return his scrutiny with a sort of vague pleasure, a half-savage confidence. . . . Was it the first embryonic feeling of race-affinity quickening in the little brain?—some intuitive, inexplicable sense of kindred? She shrank from Doctor Hecker, who addressed her in German, shook her head at

Lawyer Solari, who tried to make her answer in Italian; and her look always went back plaintively to the dark, sinister face of Laroussel,—Laroussel who had calmly taken a human life, a wicked human life, only the evening before.

—"Laroussel, you're the only Creole in this crowd," said the captain; "talk to her! Talk *gumbo* to her! . . . I've no doubt this child knows German very well, and Italian too,"—he added, maliciously—"but not in the way you gentlemen pronounce it!"

Laroussel handed his rifle to a friend, crouched down before the little girl, and looked into her face, and smiled. Her great sweet orbs shone into his one moment, seriously, as if searching; and then . . . she returned his smile. It seemed to touch something latent within the man, something rare; for his whole expression

changed; and there was a caress in his look and voice none of the men could have believed possible—as he exclaimed:—

—"*Fais moin bo, piti.*"

She pouted up her pretty lips and kissed his black moustache.

He spoke to her again:—

—"*Dis moin to nom, piti;—dis moin to nom, chère.*"

Then, for the first time, she spoke, answering in her argent treble:

—"Zouzoune."

All held their breath. Captain Harris lifted his finger to his lips to command silence.

—"Zouzoune? Zouzoune qui, chère?"

—"Zouzoune, ça c'est moin, Lili!"

—"C'est pas tout to nom, Lili;—dis moin, chère, to laut nom."

—"Mo pas connin laut nom."

—"Comment yé té pélé to maman, piti?"

—" Maman,—Maman 'Dèle."

—" Et comment yé té pélé to papa, chère?"

—" Papa Zulien."

—" Bon! Et comment to maman té pélé to papa?—dis ça à moin, chère?"

The child looked down, put a finger in her mouth, thought a moment, and replied:—

—" Li pélé li, 'Chéri'; li pélé li, 'Papoute.'"

—" Aïe, aïe!—c'est tout, ça?—to maman té jamain pélé li daut' chose?"

—" Mo pas connin, moin."

She began to play with some trinkets attached to his watch chain;—a very small gold compass especially impressed her fancy by the trembling and flashing of its tiny needle, and she murmured, coaxingly:—

—" Mo oulé ça! Donnin ça à moin."

He took all possible advantage of the situation, and replied at once:—

—"Oui! mo va donnin toi ça si to di moin to laut nom."

The splendid bribe evidently impressed her greatly; for tears rose to the brown eyes as she answered:

—" Mo pas capab di' ça;—mo pas capab di' laut nom.... Mo oulé; mo pas capab!"

Laroussel explained. The child's name was Lili,—perhaps a contraction of Eulalie; and her pet Creole name Zouzoune. He thought she must be the daughter of wealthy people; but she could not, for some reason or other, tell her family name. Perhaps she could not pronounce it well, and was afraid of being laughed at: some of the old French names were very hard for Creole children to pronounce, so long as the little ones were indulged in the habit of talking the patois; and after a

certain age their mispronunciations would be made fun of in order to accustom them to abandon the idiom of the slave-nurses, and to speak only French. Perhaps, again, she was really unable to recall the name: certain memories might have been blurred in the delicate brain by the shock of that terrible night. She said her mother's name was Adèle, and her father's Julien; but these were very common names in Louisiana,—and could afford scarcely any better clew than the innocent statement that her mother used to address her father as "dear" (*Chéri*),—or with the Creole diminutive "little papa" (*Papoute*). Then Laroussel tried to reach a clew in other ways, without success. He asked her about where she lived,—what the place was like; and she told him about fig-trees in a court, and galleries, and *banquettes*, and spoke of a *faubou'*,—without

being able to name any street. He asked her what her father used to do, and was assured that he did everything—that there was nothing he could not do. Divine absurdity of childish faith!—infinite artlessness of childish love!... Probably the little girl's parents had been residents of New Orleans—dwellers of the old colonial quarter,—the faubourg, the *faubou'*.

—"Well, gentlemen," said Captain Harris, as Laroussel abandoned his cross-examination in despair,—"all we can do now is to make inquiries. I suppose we'd better leave the child here. She is very weak yet, and in no condition to be taken to the city, right in the middle of the hot season; and nobody could care for her any better than she's being cared for here. Then, again, seems to me that as Feliu saved her life,—and that at the risk of his own,—he's got the prior claim, anyhow;

and his wife is just crazy about the child—wants to adopt her. If we can find her relatives so much the better; but I say, gentlemen, let them come right here to Feliu, themselves, and thank him as he ought to be thanked, by God! That's just what I think about it."

Carmen understood the little speech;—all the Spanish charm of her youth had faded out years before; but in the one swift look of gratitude she turned upon the captain, it seemed to blossom again;—for that quick moment, she was beautiful.

"The captain is quite right," observed Dr. Hecker: "it would be very dangerous to take the child away just now." There was no dissent.

—"All correct, boys?" asked the captain. . . . "Well, we've got to be going. By-by, Zouzoune!"

bodies along the coast, discovered on the beach of a low islet famed as a haunt of pelicans, the corpse of a child. Some locks of bright hair still adhering to the skull, a string of red beads, a white muslin dress, a handkerchief broidered with the initials "A. L. B.,"—were secured as clews; and the little body was interred where it had been found.

And, several days before, Captain Hotard, of the relief-boat *Estelle Brousseaux*, had found, drifting in the open Gulf (latitude 26° 43′; longitude 88° 17′),—the corpse of a fair-haired woman, clinging to a table. The body was disfigured beyond recognition: even the slender bones of the hands had been stripped by the nibs of the sea-birds—except one finger, the third of the left, which seemed to have been protected by a ring of gold, as by a charm. Graven within the plain yellow circlet

was a date,—"JUILLET—1851"; and the names,—"ADÈLE + JULIEN,"—separated by a cross. The *Estelle* carried coffins that day: most of them were already full; but there was one for Adèle.

Who was she?—who was her Julien?... When the *Estelle* and many other vessels had discharged their ghastly cargoes;—when the bereaved of the land had assembled as hastily as they might for the duty of identification;—when memories were strained almost to madness in research of names, dates, incidents—for the evocation of dead words, resurrection of vanished days, recollection of dear promises,—then, in the confusion, it was believed and declared that the little corpse found on the pelican island was the daughter of the wearer of the wedding-ring: Adèle La Brierre, *née* Florane, wife of Dr. Julien La Brierre, of New

Orleans, who was numbered among the missing.

And they brought dead Adèle back,—up shadowy river windings, over linked brightnesses of lake and lakelet, through many a green-glimmering bayou,—to the Creole city, and laid her to rest somewhere in the old Saint-Louis Cemetery. And upon the tablet recording her name were also graven the words:—

. . . . . .

Aussi à la mémoire de
son mari,
JULIEN RAYMOND LA BRIERRE,
né à la paroisse St. Landry,
le 29 Mai, MDCCCXXVIII;
et de leur fille,
EULALIE,
agée de 4 ans et 5 mois,—
Qui tous périrent
dans la grande tempête qui
balaya L'Ile Dernière, le
10 *Août, MDCCCLVI*

. . . + . . .

Priez pour eux!

VII.

Yet six months afterward the face of Julien La Brierre was seen again upon the streets of New Orleans. Men started at the sight of him, as at a spectre standing in the sun. And nevertheless the apparition cast a shadow. People paused, approached, half extended a hand through old habit, suddenly checked themselves and passed on,—wondering they should have forgotten, asking themselves why they had so nearly made an absurd mistake.

It was a February day,—one of those crystalline days of our snowless Southern winter, when the air is clear and cool, and outlines sharpen in the light as if viewed through the focus of a diamond glass;—and in that brightness Julien La Brierre perused his own brief epitaph, and gazed

upon the sculptured name of drowned Adèle. Only half a year had passed since she was laid away in the high wall of tombs,—in that strange colonial columbarium where the dead slept in rows, behind squared marbles lettered in black or bronze. Yet her resting-place,—in the highest range,—already seemed old. Under our Southern sun, the vegetation of cemeteries seems to spring into being spontaneously—to leap all suddenly into luxuriant life! Microscopic mossy growths had begun to mottle the slab that closed her in;—over its face some singular creeper was crawling, planting tiny reptile-feet into the chiselled letters of the inscription; and from the moist soil below speckled euphorbias were growing up to her,—and morning-glories,—and beautiful green tangled things of which he did not know the name.

And the sight of the pretty lizards, puffing their crimson pouches in the sun, or undulating athwart epitaphs, and shifting their color when approached, from emerald to ashen-gray;—the caravans of the ants, journeying to and from tiny chinks in the masonry;—the bees gathering honey from the crimson blossoms of the *crête-de-coq*, whose radicles sought sustenance, perhaps from human dust, in the decay of generations:—all that rich life of graves summoned up fancies of Resurrection, Nature's resurrection-work — wondrous transformations of flesh, marvellous transmigration of souls! . . . From some forgotten crevice of that tomb roof, which alone intervened between her and the vast light, a sturdy weed was growing. He knew that plant, as it quivered against the blue,—the *chou-gras*, as Creole children call it: its dark berries form the

mocking-bird's favorite food. . . . Might not its roots, exploring darkness, have found some unfamiliar nutriment within? —might it not be that something of the dead heart had risen to purple and emerald life—in the sap of translucent leaves, in the wine of the savage berries,—to blend with the blood of the Wizard Singer,—to lend a strange sweetness to the melody of his wooing? . . .

. . . Seldom, indeed, does it happen that a man in the prime of youth, in the possession of wealth, habituated to comforts and the elegances of life, discovers in one brief week how minute his true relation to the human aggregate,—how insignificant his part as one living atom of the social organism. Seldom, at the age of twenty-eight, has one been made able to comprehend, through experience alone, that in

the vast and complex Stream of Being he counts for less than a drop; and that, even as the blood loses and replaces its corpuscles, without a variance in the volume and vigor of its current, so are individual existences eliminated and replaced in the pulsing of a people's life, with never a pause in its mighty murmur. But all this, and much more, Julien had learned in seven merciless days—seven successive and terrible shocks of experience. The enormous world had not missed him; and his place therein was not void—society had simply forgotten him. So long as he had moved among them, all he knew for friends had performed their petty altruistic *rôles*,—had discharged their small human obligations,—had kept turned toward him the least selfish side of their natures,—had made with him a tolerably equitable exchange of ideas and of favors; and

after his disappearance from their midst, they had duly mourned for his loss—to themselves! They had played out the final act in the unimportant drama of his life: it was really asking too much to demand a repetition. . . . Impossible to deceive himself as to the feeling his unanticipated return had aroused:—feigned pity where he had looked for sympathetic welcome; dismay where he had expected surprised delight; and, oftener, airs of resignation, or disappointment ill disguised,—always insincerity, politely masked or coldly bare. He had come back to find strangers in his home, relatives at law concerning his estate, and himself regarded as an intruder among the living,—an unlucky guest, a *revenant*. . . . How hollow and selfish a world it seemed! And yet there was love in it; he had been loved in it, unselfishly, passionately, with the love of

father and of mother, of wife and child.... All buried!—all lost forever!... Oh! would to God the story of that stone were not a lie!—would to kind God he also were dead!...

Evening shadowed: the violet deepened and prickled itself with stars;—the sun passed below the west, leaving in his wake a momentary splendor of vermilion... our Southern day is not prolonged by gloaming. And Julien's thoughts darkened with the darkening, and as swiftly. For while there was yet light to see, he read another name that he used to know —the name of RAMIREZ.... *Nació en Cienfuegos, isla de Cuba.*... Wherefore born?—for what eternal purpose, Ramirez, —in the City of a Hundred Fires? He had blown out his brains before the sepulchre of his young wife.... It was a detached double vault, shaped like a huge

chest, and much dilapidated already:—under the continuous burrowing of the crawfish it had sunk greatly on one side, tilting as if about to fall. Out from its zigzag fissurings of brick and plaster, a sinister voice seemed to come:—"*Go thou and do likewise! . . . Earth groans with her burthen even now,—the burthen of Man: she holds no place for thee!*"

VIII.

. . . That voice pursued him into the darkness of his chilly room,—haunted him in the silence of his lodging. And then began within the man that ghostly struggle between courage and despair, between patient reason and mad revolt, between weakness and force, between darkness and light, which all sensitive and generous natures must wage in their own souls at least once—perhaps many times—in their

lives. Memory, in such moments, plays like an electric storm;—all involuntarily he found himself reviewing his life.

Incidents long forgotten came back with singular vividness: he saw the Past as he had not seen it while it was the Present;—remembrances of home, recollections of infancy, recurred to him with terrible intensity,—the artless pleasures and the trifling griefs, the little hurts and the tender pettings, the hopes and the anxieties of those who loved him, the smiles and tears of slaves.... And his first Creole pony, a present from his father the day after he had proved himself able to recite his prayers correctly in French, without one mispronunciation—without saying *crasse* for *grâce*;—and yellow Michel, who taught him to swim and to fish and to paddle a pirogue;—and the bayou, with its wonder-world of turtles and birds and

creeping things;—and his German tutor, who could not pronounce the *j*;—and the songs of the cane-fields,—strangely pleasing, full of quaverings and long plaintive notes, like the call of the cranes. . . . *Tou'*, *tou' pays blanc!* . . . Afterward Camanière had leased the place;—everything must have been changed; even the songs could not be the same. *Tou'*, *tou' pays blanc!—Danié qui commandé.* . . .

And then Paris; and the university, with its wild under-life,—some debts, some follies; and the frequent fond letters from home to which he might have replied so much oftener;—Paris, where talent is mediocrity; Paris, with its thunders and its splendors and its seething of passion;—Paris, supreme focus of human endeavor, with its madnesses of art, its frenzied striving to express the Inexpressible, its spasmodic strainings to clutch the Unattain-

able, its soarings of soul-fire to the heaven of the Impossible. . . .

What a rejoicing there was at his return!—how radiant and level the long Road of the Future seemed to open before him!—everywhere friends, prospects, felicitations. Then his first serious love;—and the night of the ball at St. Martinsville,—the vision of light! Gracile as a palm, and robed at once so simply, so exquisitely in white, she had seemed to him the supreme realization of all possible dreams of beauty. . . . And his passionate jealousy; and the slap from Laroussel; and the humiliating two-minute duel with rapiers in which he learned that he had found his master. The scar was deep. Why had not Laroussel killed him then? . . . Not evil-hearted, Laroussel;—they used to salute each other afterward when they met; and Laroussel's smile was kind-

indeed for the last time,—something of the deeper and nobler comprehension of human weakness and of human suffering had been revealed to him,—something of that larger knowledge without which the sense of duty can never be fully acquired, nor the understanding of unselfish goodness, nor the spirit of tenderness. The suicide is not a coward; he is an egotist.

A ray of sunlight touched his wet pillow,—awoke him. He rushed to the window, flung the latticed shutters apart, and looked out.

Something beautiful and ghostly filled all the vistas,—frost-haze; and in some queer way the mist had momentarily caught and held the very color of the sky. An azure fog! Through it the quaint and checkered street—as yet but half illumined by the sun,—took tones of impossible col-

or; the view paled away through faint bluish tints into transparent purples;—all the shadows were indigo. How sweet the morning!—how well life seemed worth living! Because the sun had shown his face through a fairy-veil of frost! . . .

Who was the ancient thinker?—was it Hermes?—who said:—

"*The Sun is Laughter; for 'tis He who maketh joyous the thoughts of men, and gladdeneth the infinite world.*" . . .

THE SHADOW OF THE TIDE.

I.

CARMEN found that her little pet had been taught how to pray; for each night and morning when the devout woman began to make her orisons, the child would kneel beside her, with little hands joined, and in a voice sweet and clear murmur something she had learned by heart. Much as this pleased Carmen, it seemed to her that the child's prayers could not be wholly valid unless uttered in Spanish;—for Spanish was heaven's own tongue,—*la lengua de Dios, el idioma de Dios;* and she resolved to teach her to say the *Salve Maria* and the *Padre Nuestro* in Castilian,—also her own favorite

prayer to the Virgin, beginning with the words, "*Madre santisima, toda dulce y hermosa.*"...

So Conchita—for a new name had been given to her with that terrible sea-christening—received her first lessons in Spanish; and she proved a most intelligent pupil. Before long she could prattle to Feliu;—she would watch for his return of evenings, and announce his coming with "*Aqui viene mi papacito!*"—she learned, too, from Carmen, many little caresses of speech to greet him with. Feliu's was not a joyous nature; he had his dark hours, his sombre days; yet it was rarely that he felt too sullen to yield to the little one's petting, when she would leap up to reach his neck and to coax his kiss, with—"*Dame un beso, papa!—así;—y otro! otro! otro!*" He grew to love her like his own;—was she not indeed his own, since

he had won her from death. And none had yet come to dispute his claim. More and more, with the passing of weeks, months, seasons, she became a portion of his life—a part of all that he wrought for. At the first, he had had a half-formed hope that the little one might be reclaimed by relatives generous and rich enough to insist upon his acceptance of a handsome compensation; and that Carmen could find some solace in a pleasant visit to Barceloneta. But now he felt that no possible generosity could requite him for her loss; and with the unconscious selfishness of affection, he commenced to dread her identification as a great calamity.

It was evident that she had been brought up nicely. She had pretty prim ways of drinking and eating, queer little fashions of sitting in company, and of addressing

people. She had peculiar notions about colors in dress, about wearing her hair; and she seemed to have already imbibed a small stock of social prejudices not altogether in harmony with the republicanism of Viosca's Point. Occasional swarthy visitors,—men of the Manilla settlements,—she spoke of contemptuously as *nègues-marrons;* and once she shocked Carmen inexpressibly by stopping in the middle of her evening prayer, declaring that she wanted to say her prayers to a *white* Virgin; Carmen's Señora de Guadalupe was only a *negra!* Then, for the first time, Carmen spoke so crossly to the child as to frighten her. But the pious woman's heart smote her the next moment for that first harsh word;—and she caressed the motherless one, consoled her, cheered her, and at last explained to her—I know not how—something very wonderful about

the little figurine, something that made Chita's eyes big with awe. Thereafter she always regarded the Virgin of Wax as an object mysterious and holy.

And, one by one, most of Chita's little eccentricities were gradually eliminated from her developing life and thought. More rapidly than ordinary children, because singularly intelligent, she learned to adapt herself to all the changes of her new environment,—retaining only that indescribable something which to an experienced eye tells of hereditary refinement of habit and of mind:—a natural grace, a thorough-bred ease and elegance of movement, a quickness and delicacy of perception.

She became strong again and active—active enough to play a great deal on the beach, when the sun was not too fierce; and Carmen made a canvas bonnet to

naughty Chita received a terrible lesson,—a lasting lesson,—which taught her the value of obedience.

She had been particularly cautioned not to venture into a certain part of the swamp in the rear of the grove, where the weeds were very tall; for Carmen was afraid some snake might bite the child. But Chita's bird-bright eye had discerned a gleam of white in that direction; and she wanted to know what it was. The white could only be seen from one point, behind the furthest house, where the ground was high. "Never go there," said Carmen; "there is a Dead Man there,—will bite you!" And yet, one day, while Carmen was unusually busy, Chita went there.

In the early days of the settlement, a Spanish fisherman had died; and his comrades had built him a little tomb with the

and caused them to slide out of place. It seemed very black inside; but Chita wanted to know what was there. She pushed her way through a gap in the thin and rotten line of pickets, and through some tall weeds with big coarse pink flowers;—then she crouched down on hands and knees before the black hole, and peered in. It was not so black inside as she had thought; for a sunbeam slanted down through a chink in the roof; and she could see!

A brown head—without hair, without eyes, but with teeth, ever so many teeth!—seemed to laugh at her; and close to it sat a Toad, the hugest she had ever seen; and the white skin of his throat kept puffing out and going in. And Chita screamed and screamed, and fled in wild terror,—screaming all the way, till Carmen ran out to meet her and carry her home.

Even when safe in her adopted mother's arms, she sobbed with fright. To the vivid fancy of the child there seemed to be some hideous relation between the staring reptile and the brown death's-head, with its empty eyes, and its nightmare-smile.

The shock brought on a fever,—a fever that lasted several days, and left her very weak. But the experience taught her to obey, taught her that Carmen knew best what was for her good. It also caused her to think a great deal. Carmen had told her that the dead people never frightened good little girls who stayed at home.

—"Madrecita Carmen," she asked, "is my mamma dead?"

—"*Pobrecita!*... Yes, my angel. God called her to Him,—your darling mother."

—"Madrecita," she asked again,—her young eyes growing vast with horror,—

"is my own mamma now like *That?*" ... She pointed toward the place of the white gleam, behind the great trees.

—"No, no, no! my darling!" cried Carmen, appalled herself by the ghastly question,—"your mamma is with the dear, good, loving God, who lives in the beautiful sky,—above the clouds, my darling, beyond the sun!"

But Carmen's kind eyes were full of tears; and the child read their meaning. He who teareth off the Mask of the Flesh had looked into her face one unutterable moment:—she had seen the brutal Truth, naked to the bone!

Yet there came to her a little thrill of consolation, caused by the words of the tender falsehood; for that which she had discerned by day could not explain to her that which she saw almost nightly in her slumber. The face, the voice, the form of

her loving mother still lived somewhere,—could not have utterly passed away; since the sweet presence came to her in dreams, bending and smiling over her, caressing her, speaking to her,—sometimes gently chiding, but always chiding with a kiss. And then the child would laugh in her sleep, and prattle in Creole,—talking to the luminous shadow, telling the dead mother all the little deeds and thoughts of the day.... Why would God only let her come at night?

... Her idea of God had been first defined by the sight of a quaint French picture of the Creation,—an engraving which represented a shoreless sea under a black sky, and out of the blackness a solemn and bearded gray head emerging, and a cloudy hand through which stars glimmered. God was like old Doctor de Coulanges, who used to visit the house, and talk in

a voice like a low roll of thunder.... At a later day, when Chita had been told that God was "everywhere at the same time"—without and within, beneath and above all things,—this idea became somewhat changed. The awful bearded face, the huge shadowy hand, did not fade from her thought; but they became fantastically blended with the larger and vaguer notion of something that filled the world and reached to the stars,—something diaphanous and incomprehensible like the invisible air, omnipresent and everlasting like the high blue of heaven....

II.

... She began to learn the life of the coast.

With her acquisition of another tongue, there came to her also the understanding of many things relating to the world of

the sea. She memorized with novel delight much that was told her day by day concerning the nature surrounding her, —many secrets of the air, many of those signs of heaven which the dwellers in cities cannot comprehend because the atmosphere is thickened and made stagnant above them—cannot even watch because the horizon is hidden from their eyes by walls, and by weary avenues of trees with whitewashed trunks. She learned, by listening, by asking, by observing also, how to know the signs that foretell wild weather:—tremendous sunsets, scuddings and bridgings of cloud,—sharpening and darkening of the sea-line,—and the shriek of gulls flashing to land in level flight, out of a still transparent sky,—and halos about the moon.

She learned where the sea-birds, with white bosoms and brown wings, made their

hidden nests of sand,—and where the cranes waded for their prey,—and where the beautiful wild-ducks, plumaged in satiny lilac and silken green, found their food,—and where the best reeds grew to furnish stems for Feliu's red-clay pipe,—and where the ruddy sea-beans were most often tossed upon the shore,—and how the gray pelicans fished all together, like men—moving in far-extending semicircles, beating the flood with their wings to drive the fish before them.

And from Carmen she learned the fables and the sayings of the sea,—the proverbs about its deafness, its avarice, its treachery, its terrific power,—especially one that haunted her for all time thereafter: *Si quieres aprender á orar, entra en el mar* (If thou wouldst learn to pray, go to the sea). She learned why the sea is salt,—how "the tears of women made

the waves of the sea,"—and how the sea has "no friends,"—and how the cat's eyes change with the tides.

What had she lost of life by her swift translation from the dusty existence of cities to the open immensity of nature's freedom? What did she gain?

Doubtless she was saved from many of those little bitternesses and restraints and disappointments which all well-bred city children must suffer in the course of their training for the more or less factitious life of society:—obligations to remain very still with every nimble nerve quivering in dumb revolt;—the injustice of being found troublesome and being sent to bed early for the comfort of her elders;—the cruel necessity of straining her pretty eyes, for many long hours at a time, over grimy desks in gloomy school-rooms, though birds might twitter and bright winds flut-

Saw the immeasurable panics,—noiseless, scintillant,—which silver, summer after summer, curved leagues of beach with bodies of little fish—the yearly massacre of migrating populations, nations of sea-trout, driven from their element by terror;—and the winnowing of shark-fins,—and the rushing of porpoises,—and the rising of the *grande-écaille*, like a pillar of flame,—and the diving and pitching and fighting of the frigates and the gulls,—and the armored hordes of crabs swarming out to clear the slope after the carnage and the gorging had been done;—

Saw the Dreams of the Sky,—scudding mockeries of ridged foam,—and shadowy stratification of capes and coasts and promontories long-drawn-out,—and imageries, multicolored, of mountain frondage, and sierras whitening above sierras,—and phantom islands ringed around with lagoons of glory;—

Saw the toppling and smouldering of cloud-worlds after the enormous conflagration of sunsets,—incandescence ruining into darkness; and after it a moving and climbing of stars among the blacknesses,—like searching lamps;—

Saw the deep kindle countless ghostly candles as for mysterious night-festival,—and a luminous billowing under a black sky, and effervescences of fire, and the twirling and crawling of phosphoric foam;—

Saw the mesmerism of the Moon;—saw the enchanted tides self-heaped in muttering obeisance before her.

Often she heard the Music of the Marsh through the night: an infinity of flutings and tinklings made by tiny amphibia,—like the low blowing of numberless little tin horns, the clanking of billions of little bells;—and, at intervals, profound tones,

vibrant and heavy, as of a bass-viol—the orchestra of the great frogs! And interweaving with it all, one continuous shrilling,—keen as the steel speech of a saw,—the stridulous telegraphy of crickets.

But always,—always, dreaming or awake, she heard the huge blind Sea chanting that mystic and eternal hymn, which none may hear without awe, which no musician can learn;—

Heard the hoary Preacher,—*El Pregonador*,—preaching the ancient Word, the word "as a fire, and as a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces,"—the Elohim-Word of the Sea! . . .

Unknowingly she came to know the immemorial sympathy of the mind with the Soul of the World,—the melancholy wrought by its moods of gray, the reverie responsive to its vagaries of mist, the exhilaration of its vast exultings—

days of windy joy, hours of transfigured light.

She felt,—even without knowing it,—the weight of the Silences, the solemnities of sky and sea in these low regions where all things seem to dream—waters and grasses with their momentary wavings,—woods gray-webbed with mosses that drip and drool,—horizons with their delusions of vapor,—cranes meditating in their marshes,—kites floating in the high blue. . . . Even the children were singularly quiet; and their play less noisy—though she could not have learned the difference—than the play of city children. Hour after hour, the women sewed or wove in silence. And the brown men,—always barefooted, always wearing rough blue shirts,—seemed, when they lounged about the wharf on idle days, as if they had told each other long ago all they knew or could ever

know, and had nothing more to say. They would stare at the flickering of the current, at the drifting of clouds and buzzards—seldom looking at each other, and always turning their black eyes again, in a weary way, to sky or sea. Even thus one sees the horses and the cattle of the coast, seeking the beach to escape the whizzing flies;—all watch the long waves rolling in, and sometimes turn their heads a moment to look at one another, but always look back to the waves again, as if wondering at a mystery. . . .

How often she herself had wondered—wondered at the multiform changes of each swell as it came in—transformations of tint, of shape, of motion, that seemed to betoken a life infinitely more subtle than the strange cold life of lizards and of fishes,—and sinister, and spectral. Then they all appeared to move in order,—ac-

cording to one law or impulse;—each had its own voice, yet all sang one and the same everlasting song. Vaguely, as she watched them and listened to them, there came to her the idea of a unity of *will* in their motion, a unity of *menace* in their utterance—the idea of one monstrous and complex life! The sea *lived:* it could crawl backward and forward; it could speak!—it only feigned deafness and sightlessness for some malevolent end. Thenceforward she feared to find herself alone with it. Was it not at her that it strove to rush, muttering, and showing its white teeth, . . . just because it knew that she was all by herself? . . . *Si quieres aprender á orar, entra en el mar!* And Concha had well learned to pray. But the sea seemed to her the one Power which God could not make to obey Him as He pleased. Saying the creed one

day, she repeated very slowly the opening words,—"*Creo en un Dios, padre todopoderoso, Criador del cielo y de la tierra,*"—and paused and thought. *Creator of Heaven and Earth?* "Madrecita Carmen," she asked,—"*quien entonces hizó el mar?*" (who then made the sea?).

—"Dios, mi querida," answered Carmen,—"God, my darling. . . . All things were made by Him" (*todas las cosas fueron hechas por Él*).

Even the wicked Sea! And He had said unto it: "Thus far, and no farther." . . . Was that why it had not overtaken and devoured her when she ran back in fear from the sudden reaching out of its waves? *Thus far. . . .?* But there were times when it disobeyed—when it rushed further, shaking the world! Was it because God was then asleep—could not hear, did not see, until too late?

And the tumultuous ocean terrified her more and more: it filled her sleep with enormous nightmare;—it came upon her in dreams, mountain-shadowing,—holding her with its spell, smothering her power of outcry, heaping itself to the stars.

Carmen became alarmed;—she feared that the nervous and delicate child might die in one of those moaning dreams out of which she had to arouse her, night after night. But Feliu, answering her anxiety with one of his favorite proverbs, suggested a heroic remedy:—

—"The world is like the sea: those who do not know how to swim in it are drowned;—and the sea is like the world," he added. . . . "Chita must learn to swim!"

And he found the time to teach her. Each morning, at sunrise, he took her into the water. She was less terrified the first time than Carmen thought she

would be;—she seemed to feel confidence in Feliu; although she screamed piteously before her first ducking at his hands. His teaching was not gentle. He would carry her out, perched upon his shoulder, until the water rose to his own neck; and there he would throw her from him, and let her struggle to reach him again as best she could. The first few mornings she had to be pulled out almost at once; but after that Feliu showed her less mercy, and helped her only when he saw she was really in danger. He attempted no other instruction until she had learned that in order to save herself from being half choked by the salt water, she must not scream; and by the time she became habituated to these austere experiences, she had already learned by instinct alone how to keep herself afloat for a while, how to paddle a little with her hands.

Then he commenced to train her to use them,—to lift them well out and throw them forward as if reaching, to dip them as the blade of an oar is dipped at an angle, without loud splashing;—and he showed her also how to use her feet. She learned rapidly and astonishingly well. In less than two months Feliu felt really proud at the progress made by his tiny pupil: it was a delight to watch her lifting her slender arms above the water in swift, easy curves, with the same fine grace that marked all her other natural motions. Later on he taught her not to fear the sea even when it growled a little,—how to ride a swell, how to face a breaker, how to dive. She only needed practice thereafter; and Carmen, who could also swim, finding the child's health improving marvellously under this new discipline, took good care that Chita

. . . Thou primordial Sea, the awfulness of whose antiquity hath stricken all mythology dumb;—thou most wrinkled living Sea, the millions of whose years outnumber even the multitude of thy hoary motions;—thou omniform and most mysterious Sea, mother of the monsters and the gods,—whence thine eternal youth? Still do thy waters hold the infinite thrill of that Spirit which brooded above their face in the Beginning!—still is thy quickening breath an elixir unto them that flee to thee for life,—like the breath of young girls, like the breath of children, prescribed for the senescent by magicians of old,—prescribed unto weazened elders in the books of the Wizards.

III.

. . . Eighteen hundred and sixty-seven;

—midsummer in the pest-smitten city of New Orleans.

Heat motionless and ponderous. The steel-blue of the sky bleached from the furnace-circle of the horizon;—the lukewarm river ran yellow and noiseless as a torrent of fluid wax. Even sounds seemed blunted by the heaviness of the air;—the rumbling of wheels, the reverberation of footsteps, fell half-toned upon the ear, like sounds that visit a dozing brain.

Daily, almost at the same hour, the continuous sense of atmospheric oppression became thickened;—a packed herd of low-bellying clouds lumbered up from the Gulf; crowded blackly against the sun; flickered, thundered, and burst in torrential rain—tepid, perpendicular—and vanished utterly away. Then, more furiously than before, the sun flamed down;—roofs and pavements steamed; the streets seem-

ed to smoke; the air grew suffocating with vapor; and the luminous city filled with a faint, sickly odor,—a stale smell, as of dead leaves suddenly disinterred from wet mould,—as of grasses decomposing after a flood. Something saffron speckled the slimy water of the gutters; sulphur some called it; others feared even to give it a name! Was it only the wind-blown pollen of some innocuous plant? I do not know; but to many it seemed as if the Invisible Destruction were scattering visible seed!... Such were the days; and each day the terror-stricken city offered up its hecatomb to death; and the faces of all the dead were yellow as flame!

"DÉCÉDÉ—;" "DÉCÉDÉE—;" "FALLECIO;"—"DIED." . . . On the door-posts, the telegraph-poles, the pillars of verandas, the lamps,—over the government letter-boxes,—everywhere glimmered the

white annunciations of death. All the city was spotted with them. And lime was poured into the gutters; and huge purifying fires were kindled after sunset.

The nights began with a black heat;—there were hours when the acrid air seemed to ferment for stagnation, and to burn the bronchial tubing;—then, toward morning, it would grow chill with venomous vapors, with morbific dews,—till the sun came up to lift the torpid moisture, and to fill the buildings with oven-glow. And the interminable procession of mourners and hearses and carriages again began to circulate between the centres of life and of death;—and long trains and steamships rushed from the port, with heavy burden of fugitives.

Wealth might flee; yet even in flight there was peril. Men, who might have

been saved by the craft of experienced nurses at home, hurriedly departed in apparent health, unconsciously carrying in their blood the toxic principle of a malady unfamiliar to physicians of the West and North;—and they died upon their way, by the road-side, by the river-banks, in woods, in deserted stations, on the cots of quarantine hospitals. Wiser those who sought refuge in the purity of the pine forests, or in those near Gulf Islands, whence the bright sea-breath kept ever sweeping back the expanding poison into the funereal swamps, into the misty lowlands. The watering-resorts became overcrowded;—then the fishing villages were thronged,—at least all which were easy to reach by steamboat or by lugger. And at last, even Viosca's Point,—remote and unfamiliar as it was,—had a stranger to shelter: a good old gentleman named

Edwards, rather broken down in health —who came as much for quiet as for sea-air, and who had been warmly recommended to Feliu by Captain Harris. For some years he had been troubled by a disease of the heart.

Certainly the old invalid could not have found a more suitable place so far as rest and quiet were concerned. The season had early given such little promise that several men of the Point betook themselves elsewhere; and the aged visitor had two or three vacant cabins from among which to select a dwelling-place. He chose to occupy the most remote of all, which Carmen furnished for him with a cool moss bed and some necessary furniture,—including a big wooden rocking-chair. It seemed to him very comfortable thus. He took his meals with the family, spent most of the day in his own quarters, spoke very

little, and lived so unobtrusively and inconspicuously that his presence in the settlement was felt scarcely more than that of some dumb creature,—some domestic animal,—some humble pet whose relation to the family is only fully comprehended after it has failed to appear for several days in its accustomed place of patient waiting,—and we know that it is dead.

IV.

Persistently and furiously, at half-past two o'clock of an August morning, Spariccio rang Dr. La Brierre's night-bell. He had fifty dollars in his pocket, and a letter to deliver. He was to earn another fifty dollars—deposited in Feliu's hands,—by bringing the Doctor to Viosca's Point. He had risked his life for that money,—and was terribly in earnest.

Julien descended in his under-clothing,

and opened the letter by the light of the hall lamp. It enclosed a check for a larger fee than he had ever before received, and contained an urgent request that he would at once accompany Sparicio to Viosca's Point,—as the sender was in hourly danger of death. The letter, penned in a long, quavering hand, was signed,—"*Henry Edwards.*"

His father's dear old friend! Julien could not refuse to go,—though he feared it was a hopeless case. *Angina pectoris*,—and a third attack at seventy years of age! Would it even be possible to reach the sufferer's bedside in time? "*Duè giorno,—con vento*,"—said Sparicio. Still, he must go; and at once. It was Friday morning;—might reach the Point Saturday night, with a good wind.... He roused his housekeeper, gave all needful instructions, prepared his little medicine-chest;

—and long before the first rose-gold fire of day had flashed to the city spires, he was sleeping the sleep of exhaustion in the tiny cabin of a fishing-sloop.

. . . For eleven years Julien had devoted himself, heart and soul, to the exercise of that profession he had first studied rather as a polite accomplishment than as a future calling. In the unselfish pursuit of duty he had found the only possible consolation for his irreparable loss; and when the war came to sweep away his wealth, he entered the struggle valorously, not to strive against men, but to use his science against death. After the passing of that huge shock, which left all the imposing and splendid fabric of Southern feudalism wrecked forever, his profession stood him in good stead;—he found himself not only able to supply those personal wants he cared to satisfy, but also to alleviate the

misery of many whom he had known in days of opulence;—the princely misery that never doffed its smiling mask, though living in secret, from week to week, on bread and orange-leaf tea;—the misery that affected condescension in accepting an invitation to dine,—staring at the face of a watch (refused by the Mont-de-Piété) with eyes half blinded by starvation;—the misery which could afford but one robe for three marriageable daughters,—one plain dress to be worn in turn by each of them, on visiting days;—the pretty misery—young, brave, sweet,—asking for a "treat" of cakes too jocosely to have its asking answered,—laughing and coquetting with its well-fed wooers, and crying for hunger after they were gone. Often and often, his heart had pleaded against his purse for such as these, and won its case in the silent courts of Self. But ever mysteri-

ously the gift came,—sometimes as if from the hand of a former slave; sometimes as from a remorseful creditor, ashamed to write his name. Only yellow Victorine knew; but the Doctor's housekeeper never opened those sphinx-lips of hers, until years after the Doctor's name had disappeared from the City Directory. . . .

He had grown quite thin,—a little gray. The epidemic had burthened him with responsibilities too multifarious and ponderous for his slender strength to bear. The continual nervous strain of abnormally protracted duty, the perpetual interruption of sleep, had almost prostrated even his will. Now he only hoped that, during this brief absence from the city, he might find renewed strength to do his terrible task.

Mosquitoes bit savagely; and the heat became thicker;—and there was yet no

wind. Sparicio and his hired boy Carmelo had been walking backward and forward for hours overhead, — urging the vessel yard by yard, with long poles, through the slime of canals and bayous. With every heavy push, the weary boy would sigh out, — "*Santo Antonio!* — *Santo Antonio!*" Sullen Sparicio himself at last burst into vociferations of ill-humor: — "*Santo Antonio?* — *Ah! santissimu e santu diavulu! . . . Sacramentu pœscite vegnu un asidente!* — *malidittu lu Signuri!*" All through the morning they walked and pushed, trudged and sighed and swore; and the minutes dragged by more wearily than the shuffling of their feet. "*Managgia Cristo co tutta a croce!*" . . . "*Santissimu e santu diavulu!!*" . . .

But as they reached at last the first of the broad bright lakes, the heat lifted, the breeze leaped up, the loose sail flapped

and filled; and, bending graciously as a skater, the old *San Marco* began to shoot in a straight line over the blue flood. Then, while the boy sat at the tiller, Sparicio lighted his tiny charcoal furnace below, and prepared a simple meal, — delicious yellow macaroni, flavored with goats' cheese; some fried fish, that smelled appetizingly; and rich black coffee, of Oriental fragrance and thickness. Julien ate a little, and lay down to sleep again. This time his rest was undisturbed by the mosquitoes; and when he woke, in the cooling evening, he felt almost refreshed. The *San Marco* was flying into Barataria Bay. Already the lantern in the lighthouse tower had begun to glow like a little moon; and right on the rim of the sea, a vast and vermilion sun seemed to rest his chin. Gray pelicans came flapping around the mast;—sea-birds sped hurtling

by, their white bosoms rose-flushed by the western glow. . . . Again Sparicio's little furnace was at work, — more fish, more macaroni, more black coffee; also a square-shouldered bottle of gin made its appearance. Julien ate less sparingly at this second meal; and smoked a long time on deck with Sparicio, who suddenly became very good-humored, and chatted volubly in bad Spanish, and in much worse English. Then while the boy took a few hours' sleep, the Doctor helped delightedly in manœuvring the little vessel. He had been a good yachtsman in other years; and Sparicio declared he would make a good fisherman. By midnight the *San Marco* began to run with a long, swinging gait;—she had reached deep water. Julien slept soundly; the steady rocking of the sloop seemed to soothe his nerves.

—"After all," he thought to himself, as

he rose from his little bunk next morning,—"something like this is just what I needed." . . . The pleasant scent of hot coffee greeted him;—Carmelo was handing him the tin cup containing it, down through the hatchway. After drinking it he felt really hungry;—he ate more macaroni than he had ever eaten before. Then, while Sparicio slept, he aided Carmelo; and during the middle of the day he rested again. He had not had so much uninterrupted repose for many a week. He fancied he could feel himself getting strong. At supper-time it seemed to him he could not get enough to eat,—although there was plenty for everybody.

All day long there had been exactly the same wave-crease distorting the white shadow of the *San Marco's* sail upon the blue water;—all day long they had been skimming over the liquid level of a world

so jewel-blue that the low green ribbon-strips of marsh land, the far-off fleeing lines of pine-yellow sand beach, seemed flaws or breaks in the perfected color of the universe;—all day long had the cloudless sky revealed through all its exquisite transparency that inexpressible tenderness which no painter and no poet can ever reimage,—that unutterable sweetness which no art of man may ever shadow forth, and which none may ever comprehend,—though we feel it to be in some strange way akin to the luminous and unspeakable charm that makes us wonder at the eyes of a woman when she loves.

Evening came; and the great dominant celestial tone deepened;—the circling horizon filled with ghostly tints,—spectral greens and grays, and pearl-lights and fish-colors. . . . Carmelo, as he crouched at the tiller, was singing, in a low, clear

added the boatman, with his peculiar dark smile. And then Carmelo sang, loud and clearly, the song he had been singing before,—one of those artless Mediterranean ballads, full of caressing vowel-sounds, and young passion, and melancholy beauty:—

"M' ama ancor, beltà fulgente,
Come tu m' amasti allor;—
Ascoltar non dei gente,
Solo interroga il tuo cor.". . .

—"He sing-a nicee,—mucha bueno!" murmured the fisherman. And then, suddenly,—with a rich and splendid basso that seemed to thrill every fibre of the planking,—Sparicio joined in the song:—

"M' ama pur d' amore eterno,
Nè delitto sembri a te;
T' assicuro che l' inferno
Una favola sol è.". . .

All the roughness of the man was gone! To Julien's startled fancy, the fishers had

ceased to be;—lo! Carmelo was a princely page; Sparicio, a king! How perfectly their voices married together!—they sang with passion, with power, with truth, with that wondrous natural art which is the birthright of the rudest Italian soul. And the stars throbbed out in the heaven; and the glory died in the west; and the night opened its heart; and the splendor of the eternities fell all about them. Still they sang; and the *San Marco* sped on through the soft gloom, ever slightly swerved by the steady blowing of the southeast wind in her sail;—always wearing the same crimpling-frill of wave-spray about her prow,—always accompanied by the same smooth-backed swells,—always spinning out behind her the same long trail of interwoven foam. And Julien looked up. Ever the night thrilled more and more with silent twinklings;—more

and more multitudinously lights pointed in the eternities;—the Evening Star quivered like a great drop of liquid white fire ready to fall;—Vega flamed as a pharos lighting the courses ethereal,—to guide the sailing of the suns, and the swarming of fleets of worlds. Then the vast sweetness of that violet night entered into his blood,—filled him with that awful joy, so near akin to sadness, which the sense of the Infinite brings,—when one feels the poetry of the Most Ancient and Most Excellent of Poets, and then is smitten at once with the contrast-thought of the sickliness and selfishness of Man,—of the blindness and brutality of cities, whereinto the divine blue light never purely comes, and the sanctification of the Silences never descends . . . furious cities, walled away from heaven. . . . Oh! if one could only sail on thus always, always

through such a night—through such a star-sprinkled violet light, and hear Sparicio and Carmelo sing, even though it were the same melody always, always the same song!

. . . "Scuza, Doct-a!—look-a out!" Julien bent down, as the big boom, loosened, swung over his head. The *San Marco* was rounding into shore,—heading for her home. Sparicio lifted a huge conch-shell from the deck, put it to his lips, filled his deep lungs, and flung out into the night—thrice—a profound, mellifluent, booming horn-tone. A minute passed. Then, ghostly faint, as an echo from very far away, a triple blowing responded. . . .

And a long purple mass loomed and swelled into sight, heightened, approached—land and trees black-shadowing, and lights that swung. . . . The *San Marco* glided into a bayou,—under a high wharf-

ing of timbers, where a bearded fisherman waited, and a woman. Sparicio flung up a rope.

The bearded man caught it by the lantern-light, and tethered the *San Marco* to her place. Then he asked, in a deep voice:

—"*Has traido al Doctor?*"

—"*Si, si!*" answered Sparicio. . . . "*Y el viejo?*"

—"*Aye! pobre!*" responded Feliu,—"*hace tres dias que esta muerto.*"

Henry Edwards was dead!

He had died very suddenly, without a cry or a word, while resting in his rocking-chair,—the very day after Sparicio had sailed. They had made him a grave in the marsh,—among the high weeds, not far from the ruined tomb of the Spanish fisherman. But Sparicio had fairly earned his hundred dollars.

V.

So there was nothing to do at Viosca's Point except to rest. Feliu and all his men were going to Barataria in the morning on business;—the Doctor could accompany them there, and take the Grand Island steamer Monday for New Orleans. With this intention Julien retired,—not sorry for being able to stretch himself at full length on the good bed prepared for him, in one of the unoccupied cabins. But he woke before day with a feeling of intense prostration, a violent headache, and such an aversion for the mere idea of food that Feliu's invitation to breakfast at five o'clock gave him an internal qualm. Perhaps a touch of malaria. In any case he felt it would be both dangerous and useless to return to town unwell; and Feliu, observing his condition, himself advised

against the journey. Wednesday he would have another opportunity to leave; and in the meanwhile Carmen would take good care of him. . . . The boats departed, and Julien slept again.

The sun was high when he rose up and dressed himself, feeling no better. He would have liked to walk about the place, but felt nervously afraid of the sun. He did not remember having ever felt so broken down before. He pulled a rocking-chair to the window, tried to smoke a cigar. It commenced to make him feel still sicker, and he flung it away. It seemed to him the cabin was swaying, as the *San Marco* swayed when she first reached the deep water.

A light rustling sound approached,—a sound of quick feet treading the grass: then a shadow slanted over the threshold. In the glow of the open doorway stood a

young girl,—gracile, tall,—with singularly splendid eyes,—brown eyes peeping at him from beneath a golden riot of loose hair.

—"*M'sieu-le-Docteur, maman d'mande si vous n'avez bisoin d'que'que chose?*" . . . She spoke the rude French of the fishing villages, where the language lives chiefly as a *baragouin*, mingled often with words and forms belonging to many other tongues. She wore a loose-falling dress of some light stuff, steel-gray in color;—boys' shoes were on her feet.

He did not reply;—and her large eyes grew larger for wonder at the strange fixed gaze of the physician, whose face had visibly bleached,—blanched to corpse-pallor. Silent seconds passed; and still the eyes stared—flamed as if the life of the man had centralized and focussed within them.

His voice had risen to a cry in his throat, quivered and swelled one passionate instant, and failed — as in a dream when one strives to call, and yet can only moan. . . . *She!* Her unforgotten eyes, her brows, her lips!—the oval of her face!—the dawn-light of her hair! . . . Adèle's own poise,—her own grace!—even the very turn of her neck,—even the bird-tone of her speech! . . . Had the grave sent forth a Shadow to haunt him?—could the perfidious Sea have yielded up its dead? For one terrible fraction of a minute, memories, doubts, fears, mad fancies, went pulsing through his brain with a rush like the rhythmic throbbing of an electric stream;—then the shock passed, the Reason spoke:—"Fool!—count the long years since you first saw her thus!—count the years that have gone since you looked upon her last! And Time has never

halted, silly heart!—neither has Death stood still!"

. . . "*Plait-il?*"—the clear voice of the young girl asked. She thought he had made some response she could not distinctly hear.

Mastering himself an instant, as the heart faltered back to its duty, and the color remounted to his lips, he answered her in French:—

—"Pardon me!—I did not hear . . . you gave me such a start!". . . But even then another extraordinary fancy flashed through his thought;—and with the *tutoiement* of a parent to a child, with an irresistible outburst of such tenderness as almost frightened her, he cried: "Oh! merciful God!—how like her! . . . Tell me, darling, your name;—tell me who you are?" (*Dis-moi qui tu es, mignonne;—dis-moi ton nom.*)

. . . Who was it had asked her the same question, in another idiom—ever so long ago? The man with the black eyes and nose like an eagle's beak,—the one who gave her the compass. Not *this* man—no!

She answered, with the timid gravity of surprise:—

—"Chita Viosca."

He still watched her face, and repeated the name slowly,—reiterated it in a tone of wonderment:—"Chita Viosca?—Chita Viosca!"

—"*C'est à dire* . . ." she said, looking down at her feet,—"Concha—Conchita." His strange solemnity made her smile,—the smile of shyness that knows not what else to do. But it was the smile of dead Adèle.

—"Thanks, my child," he exclaimed of a sudden,—in a quick, hoarse, changed

the peachy curve between neck and cheek. . . . His own little Zouzoune had a birth-mark like that!—he remembered the faint pink trace left by his fingers above and below it the day he had slapped her for overturning his ink-bottle. . . . "*To laimin moin?—to batté moin!*"

—"Chita!—Chita!"

She did not hear. . . . After all, what a mistake he might have made! Were not Nature's coincidences more wonderful than fiction? Better to wait,—to question the mother first, and thus make sure.

Still—there were so many coincidences! The face, the smile, the eyes, the voice, the whole charm;—then that mark,—and the fair hair. Zouzoune had always resembled Adèle so strangely! That golden hair was a Scandinavian bequest to the Florane family;—the tall daughter of a Norwegian sea-captain had once become

the wife of a Florane. Viosca?—who ever knew a Viosca with such hair? Yet again, these Spanish emigrants sometimes married blonde German girls.... Might be a case of atavism, too. Who was this Viosca? If that was his wife,—the little brown Carmen,—whence Chita's sunny hair?...

And this was part of that same desolate shore whither the Last Island dead had been drifted by that tremendous surge! On a clear day, with a good glass, one might discern from here the long blue streak of that ghastly coast.... Somewhere—between here and there.... Merciful God!...

... But again! That bivouac-night before the fight at Chancellorsville, Larousel had begun to tell him such a singular story ... Chance had brought them,—the old enemies,—together; made them dear

friends in the face of Death. How little he had comprehended the man!—what a [illegible] went up that day [illegible] was it [illegible]ole girl [illegible]y which [illegible] a pain! [illegible]o much, [illegible] of ner- [illegible]own, and [illegible]he head [illegible] bearable. [illegible]n now. [illegible] the mos- [illegible]ll, breath- [illegible]ects were thick;—they filled the room with a continuous ebullient sound, as if invisible kettles were boiling overhead. A sign of storm. . . . Still, it was strange!—he could not perspire. . . .

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Then it seemed to him that Laroussel was bending over him—Laroussel in his cavalry uniform. "*Bon jour, camarade! —nous allons avoir un bien mauvais temps, mon pauvre Julien.*" How! bad weather?—"*Comment un mauvais temps?*" ... He looked in Laroussel's face. There was something so singular in his smile. Ah! yes,—he remembered now: it was the wound! ... "*Un vilain temps!*" whispered Laroussel. Then he was gone.... Whither?

—"*Chéri!*"...

The whisper roused him with a fearful start.... Adèle's whisper! So she was wont to rouse him sometimes in the old sweet nights,—to crave some little attention for ailing Eulalie,—to make some little confidence she had forgotten to utter during the happy evening.... No, no! It was only the trees. The sky was cloud-

ing over. The wind was rising. . . . How his heart beat! how his temples pulsed! Why, this was fever! Such pains in the back and head!

Still his skin was dry,—dry as parchment,—burning. He rose up; and a bursting weight of pain at the base of the skull made him reel like a drunken man. He staggered to the little mirror nailed upon the wall, and looked. How his eyes glowed;—and there was blood in his mouth! He felt his pulse—spasmodic, terribly rapid. Could it possibly—? . . . No: this must be some pernicious malarial fever! The Creole does not easily fall a prey to the great tropical malady,—unless after a long absence in other climates. True! he had been four years in the army! But this was 1867. . . . He hesitated a moment; then,—opening his medicine-chest, he measured out and swallowed thirty grains of quinine.

Then he lay down again. His head pained more and more;—it seemed as if the cervical vertebræ were filled with fluid iron. And still his skin remained dry as if tanned. Then the anguish grew so intense as to force a groan with almost every aspiration. . . . Nausea,—and the stinging bitterness of quinine rising in his throat;—dizziness, and a brutal wrenching within his stomach. Everything began to look pink;—the light was rose-colored. It darkened more,—kindled with deepening tint. Something kept sparkling and spinning before his sight, like a firework. . . . Then a burst of blood mixed with chemical bitterness filled his mouth; the light became scarlet as claret. . . . This—this was . . . not malaria. . . .

VI.

. . . Carmen knew what it was; but the brave little woman was not afraid of it. Many a time before she had met it face to face, in Havanese summers; she knew how to wrestle with it;—she had torn Feliu's life away from its yellow clutch, after one of those long struggles that strain even the strength of love. Now she feared mostly for Chita. She had ordered the girl under no circumstances to approach the cabin.

Julien felt that blankets had been heaped upon him,—that some gentle hand was bathing his scorching face with vinegar and water. Vaguely also there came to him the idea that it was night. He saw the shadow-shape of a woman moving against the red light upon the wall;—he saw there was a lamp burning.

Then the delirium seized him: he moaned, sobbed, cried like a child,—talked wildly at intervals in French, in English, in Spanish.

—"*Mentira!*—you could not be her mother. . . . Still, if you were— And she must not come in here,—*jamas!* . . . Carmen, did you know Adèle,—Adèle Florane? So like her,—so like,—God only knows how like! . . . Perhaps I think I know;—but I do not—do not know justly, fully—how like! . . . *Si! si!—es el vómito!—yo lo conozco, Carmen!* . . . She must not die twice. . . . I died twice. . . . I am going to die again. She only once. Till the heavens be no more she will not rise. . . . *Moi, au contraire, il faut que je me lève toujours!* They need me so much;—the slate is always full; the bell will never stop. They will ring that bell for me when I am dead. . . . So will I rise

again!—*resurgam!* . . . How could I save him?—could not save myself. It was a bad case,—at seventy years! . . . There! *Qui çà?*" . . .

He saw Laroussel again,—reaching out a hand to him through a whirl of red smoke. He tried to grasp it, and could not. . . . "*N'importe, mon ami,*" said Laroussel,—"*tu vas la voir bientôt.*" Who was he to see soon?—"*qui donc, Laroussel?*" But Laroussel did not answer. Through the red mist he seemed to smile; —then passed.

For some hours Carmen had trusted she could save her patient,—desperate as the case appeared to be. His was one of those rapid and violent attacks, such as often despatch their victims in a single day. In the Cuban hospitals she had seen many and many terrible examples: strong

young men,—soldiers fresh from Spain,—carried panting to the fever wards at sunrise; carried to the cemeteries at sunset. Even troopers riddled with revolutionary bullets had lingered longer. . . . Still, she had believed she might save Julien's life: the burning forehead once began to bead, the burning hands grew moist.

But now the wind was moaning;—the air had become lighter, thinner, cooler. A storm was gathering in the east; and to the fever-stricken man the change meant death. . . . Impossible to bring the priest of the Caminada now; and there was no other within a day's sail. She could only pray; she had lost all hope in her own power to save.

Still the sick man raved; but he talked to himself at longer intervals, and with longer pauses between his words;—his voice was growing more feeble, his speech

more incoherent. His thought vacillated and distorted, like flame in a wind.

Weirdly the past became confounded with the present; impressions of sight and of sound interlinked in fastastic affinity,—the face of Chita Viosca, the murmur of the rising storm. Then flickers of spectral lightning passed through his eyes, through his brain, with every throb of the burning arteries; then utter darkness came,—a darkness that surged and moaned, as the circumfluence of a shadowed sea. And through and over the moaning pealed one multitudinous human cry, one hideous interblending of shoutings and shriekings. . . . A woman's hand was locked in his own. . . . "Tighter," he muttered, "tighter still, darling! hold as long as you can!" It was the tenth night of August, eighteen hundred and fifty-six. . . .

—"*Chéri!*"...

Again the mysterious whisper startled him to consciousness,—the dim knowledge of a room filled with ruby-colored light,—and the sharp odor of vinegar. The house swung round slowly;—the crimson flame of the lamp lengthened and broadened by turns;—then everything turned dizzily fast,—whirled as if spinning in a vortex.... Nausea unutterable; and a frightful anguish as of teeth devouring him within,—tearing more and more furiously at his breast. Then one atrocious wrenching, rending, burning,—and the gush of blood burst from lips and nostrils in a smothering deluge. Again the vision of lightnings, the swaying, and the darkness of long ago. "Quick!—quick!—hold fast to the table, Adèle!—never let go!"...

...Up,—up,—up!—what! higher yet? Up to the red sky! Red—black-red....

heated iron when its vermilion dies. So, too, the frightful flood! And noiseless. Noiseless because heavy, clammy,—thick, warm, sickening . . . blood? Well might the land quake for the weight of such a tide! . . . Why did Adèle speak Spanish? Who prayed for him? . . .

—"*Alma de Cristo santísima santificame!*

"*Sangre de Cristo, embriágame!*

"*O buen Jesus, oye me!*" . . .

Out of the darkness into—such a light! An azure haze! Ah!—the delicious frost! . . . . . All the streets were filled with the sweet blue mist. . . . . Voiceless the City and white;—crooked and weed-grown its narrow ways! . . . . . Old streets of tombs, these. . . . . Eh! how odd a custom!—a Night-bell at every door. Yes, of course!—a *night*-bell!—the Dead are Physicians of Souls: they may

be summoned only by night,—called up from the darkness and silence. . . . Yet *she?*—might he not dare to ring for her even by day?. . . . . Strange he had deemed it day!—why, it was black, starless. . . . And it was growing queerly cold. . . . . How should he ever find her now? It was so black . . . so cold! . . .

—"*Chéri!*"

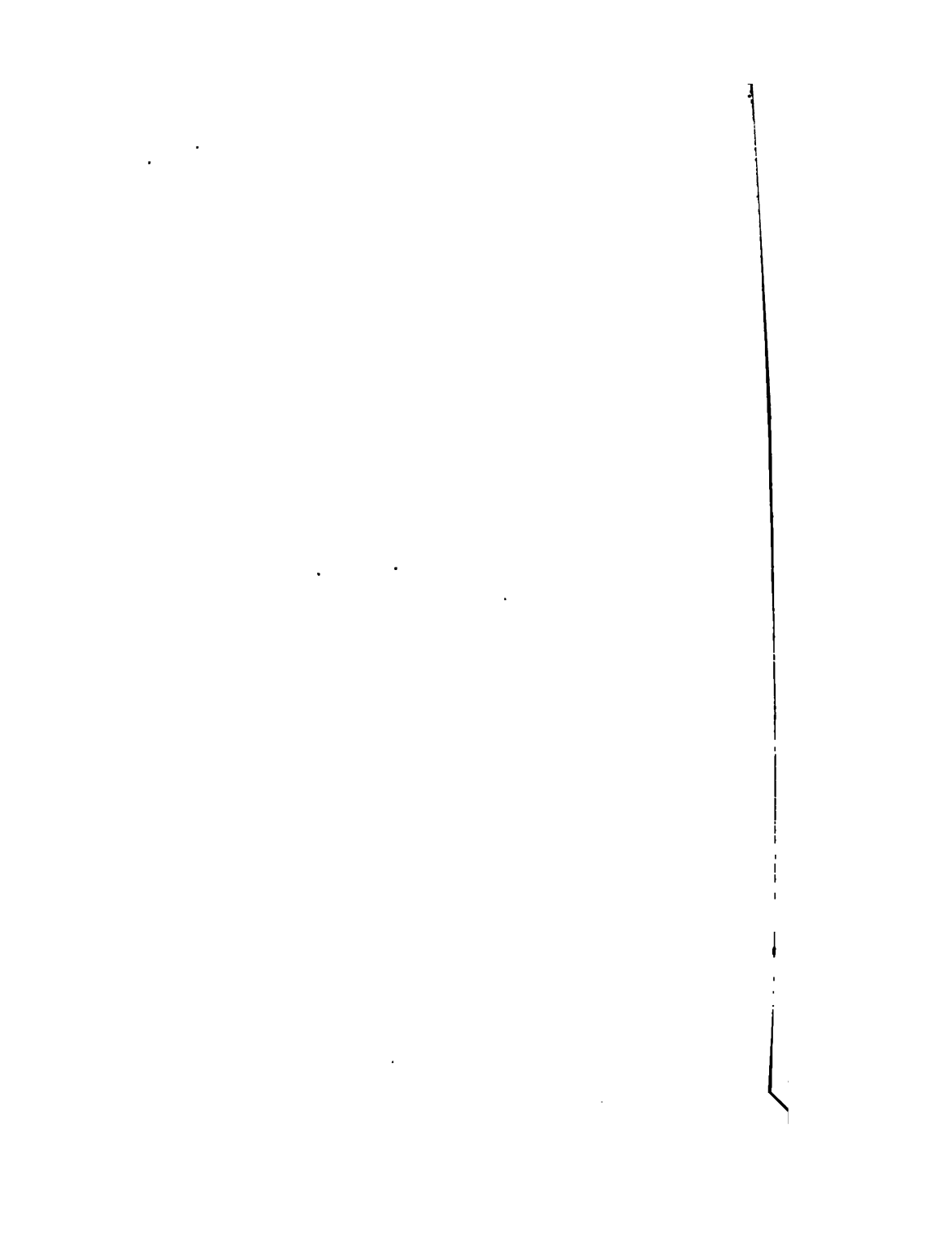
All the dwelling quivered with the mighty whisper.

Outside, the great oaks were trembling to their roots;—all the shore shook and blanched before the calling of the sea.

And Carmen, kneeling at the feet of the dead, cried out, alone in the night:—

—"*O Jesus misericordioso!—tened compasion de él!*"

THE END.



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